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Interview with  
Louis Grabinski  
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Place of Interview: Denton, Texas  
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello  
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(Signature)  
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Oral History Collection

Louis Grabinski

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Louis Grabinski for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on October 18, 1977, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Grabinski in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the battleship USS West Virginia during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Grabinski, 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. Grabinski: I was born on August 25, 1920, in Erie, Pennsylvania . . . in Erie County, too. I went to high school there--Erie Tech High--and I completed the tenth grade there. That's when I joined the Navy. I joined the Navy on August 26, 1940, the day after my birthday.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the Navy?

Grabinski: Well, at that time, the employment was really . . . what I call really skinny. You couldn't get a job anywhere. I come from a very large family of ten, and I'm sort of the one what you'd call a wanderer. I ran away from home when I was twelve at one time. I just couldn't see myself being around Erie, Pennsylvania, for one thing; I thought it was like being tied down. Occasionally, before I joined the Navy, I did hop freights and everything and got out of Erie a few times. But I found out that world was cruel out there, too.

So I tried to join the Navy when I was seventeen, but my mother--as a mother is--she wouldn't release one of her children. I come from a very big family--ten--five sisters and four other brothers. So she would not sign for me, and I could not join the Navy at that time.

So in 1940, I got my dad to go to the recruiting office with me--got him to sign me in. In other words, there was a preliminary examination in Erie, Pennsylvania, and he signed all the papers--this was prior to the 26th of August--and they accepted me in Erie with the intentions that they were going to ship me to Buffalo for the final acceptance. So my dad signed for me, but when we came home and we told my mother what happened, why, my dad was really on the "list"

then. In other words, she started hollering and screaming that, you know, he was giving his son away . . . and I was number five in the family, too.

But she got over it, so I went on to Buffalo, New York. In other words, this is prior to the 26th. The day I was sworn in was actually August 26th; it was either a day or two before I went up there. At that time, we had to pay our own way up there, so I even hopped a freight to go to Buffalo, which is ninety or one hundred miles away. So I hopped a freight going up to Buffalo.

When I got there, my physical and everything was all right, except I was underweight. I think it was 128 pounds or something like that. So the chief told me . . . the chief recruiter who was sort of handling my application told me to eat a lot of bananas, drink a lot of water, and come back about one o'clock that afternoon. So I proceeded to do that, and I mean I was bloated when I went in there. They weighed me; I passed the weight, which was the only thing holding me back.

They accepted me, and, you know, as I was accepted . . . when we finally got into a room there, a Navy lieutenant come in there--there must have been twelve to fourteen of us that were lined up--and this lieutenant come into the room and said, "I'm going to let you men think this over." He

kept emphasizing and pointing out that "You are going into the Navy for six long years!" He said, "You'll be old men by the time you get out." So he said, "I'm going to give you the chance to change your mind." So he left and came back in ten minutes, and we were still standing there. He said, "When I come back, raise your right hand," so we had our hands up. We were sworn in, so I enlisted in the Navy on August 26, 1940. That's how I got into the Navy.

Marcello: Let's just back up here a minute. I have a few other preliminary questions that I need to ask at this stage.

Grabinski: All right.

Marcello: You mention that economics played a part in influencing you to join the service. You know, this is a standard reason that a great many people of your particular generation give for having joined the service. The pay wasn't great in the service, but there was a certain amount of security, a place to sleep, food, so on and so forth.

Grabinski: Well, sure. In other words, like, I come from a large family. My dad was the only one working. Well, some of my sisters were working, and they were sort of getting scattered out. But prior to that, I knew that the Depression was . . . in other words, we ate many potatoes, a lot of soup, a lot of bread. Or even I remember we had sort of like a dark rye bread, and with lard and a little salt on it, boy, that tastes

very good. In other words, I felt that I could not make it around Erie, Pennsylvania, because I had previous experiences of trying to run away. I did run away several times, but I found out it was still hard out there, because being as young as I was, I could not make it.

Another thing that happened . . . my dad was working at the General Electric plant in Erie, and he was trying to get me in it. After I went to boot camp--I think the third or fourth week I was there--I got this letter from home and a letter from General Electric to report to work. I mean, I wondered if I did the right thing again, see.

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

Grabinski: Well, for the simple reason that I lived around the lake there and the bay. We used to challenge the Coast Guard; the Coast Guard was stationed there. There was a channel there. We used to "pull the oar" against them, and we were pretty strong against them; we could beat them most of the time. And the water and everything else influenced me. The Navy was my ideal of where I wanted to be, because I loved the sea and the water. I still enjoy it, because I live in Long Beach; I'm just a half a block from the ocean.

Marcello: At the time that you joined the Navy, how closely were you keeping abreast with current events and world affairs and

things of that nature?

Grabinski: Not at all. In other words, all that I was concerned with was to get through this boot training for one thing. I went to the training center in Newport, Rhode Island, and this was in October, and it was getting cold up there. Well, I was sort of used to cold. But we were the company that they were trying to decide how long of a training period we were supposed to have. It was sixteen weeks. So we were the company that, at that time, they were going to stop us . . . they felt that twelve weeks were enough. Well, we were turning in all our gear, and then something happened; we had to take our gear back. Then I think two weeks later, they said they were going to make it a twelve-week training instead of sixteen weeks. So we finished . . . I think it was fourteen weeks and not completely sixteen weeks there.

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

Grabinski: Oh, no. I mean, we had a bunch of men from New York City and Brooklyn and all that. These people . . . in other words, I found out that these people were similar to me, but they were more bold and more broad in the way they did things. There was one time when we were passing in review, and these two fellows from New York were marching, and they invariably started



to argue. And here we are passing in review. What did they do to us after that was every night we had to go out there and march. We were all punished; not the two men that were causing this, but the whole company was. I remember that. In other words, I was among people from different areas like New York and all that I'd heard of but had never been there. There were Italians and Poles and Irish kids. It seemed like . . . I felt they were about in the same boat that I was in--they must have been. But they were a little more . . . I mean, they would cause a lot of commotion around there. It was a lot of fun to them, but I was a rather quiet person, and I noticed that more so than anyone else. I gained some good friendships out of it. Now that I am in the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, I have run into some of these people. So, you know, I mean, there's a meaning there; it's still stretching out; we're still meeting somewhere along the line.

Marcello: Where did you go from boot camp?

Grabinski: From boot camp, we went on a train across . . . well, I went home for a leave prior to going to the West Coast. In other words, we finished boot camp, I think, sometime in October, and we caught a train going cross-country to Long Beach, California. That was quite an experience taking that long train ride, because it was similar to a troop train, really.

There was a lot of sailors on there.

One thing I found out is that these people that are in charge have clever ways of sort of getting donations out of you, you know. In other words, they figured . . . pass the hat around for the chief, you know, in charge, and they did that to us, and I think they did it to similar troop movements or sailor movements. This was something that I noticed about it, and I says, "Well, boy, I'm learning fast." We didn't have much money at that time, but they still were able to get what we called a cumshaw or a donation to their cause, see.

During that time on that train, I felt, "Boy, this is a pretty good life. I'm eating on the train." You know, they fed us on the train and everything else. It was much better than being at home. Here I am, crossing the country; I felt more than likely if I stayed in Erie, Pennsylvania, I'd never have a chance to do it. Here I am, going all the way to California, which is where I wanted to go when I was running away in my earlier years, but I only got as far as Chicago. So I was really elated, you know, that this was happening. In other words, there was no fear; this was what I wanted, and I was really going to have a good time.

So we got to Long Beach, and the train pulled up, if I remember, right at the dock. Right from the dock, we got on the boats. They loaded us on boats. At that time, I'll

always remember, we carried our own sea bag; we carried our own bedding, which was a hammock made out of canvas. Your mattress, your pillow, all of your bedding . . . you carried that wherever you went. So you had to load this in the boat, and, I mean, that's a lot of . . . and these days sailors don't do it, but, I mean, I remember that. As I mentioned before, I was what you'd say a skinny kid at that time, and I was lugging, I'd say, seventy to eighty pounds of gear with me. So you had to load it in the boat.

We got in the boat at the dock--quite a few of us--and we went out quite a distance. There was a breakwater, and out beyond the breakwater is where quite a few battleships were anchored out there. When I seen the ship we were approaching, the West Virginia, I said, "I've never seen a ship that big!" It looked enormous, you know.

So we got aboard there. In other words, we come to the gangway lugging our personal possessions--possessions that the Navy gave us--aboard. Boy, I mean, I was all eyes; I was looking all over that place and wondering, "God Almighty! What a big ship!" I'd never seen a ship that big, not even on Lake Erie. I mean, well, they couldn't get in Lake Erie.

This was an enormous ship, and I noticed the cleanliness of it. Those were wood decks . . . but, God, they were very clean. The paint and everything about it was . . . even the

brass was shining. I mean, there was a glitter to it.  
I was amazed at how well it was, see.

So we were lined up, and then we were assigned to divisions. At first, I was assigned to the Second Division aboard the USS West Virginia, battleship BB-48, and I went to the Second Division. They found out very shortly that they had too many recruits or "boots" as they called us. So then they transferred me over to the First Division. So over to the First Division was from the port side to the starboard side but toward the bow. So it was a very easy move; I was glad of that for one thing. I was put into First Division.

Marcello: Let's back up just a minute.

Grabinski: All right.

Marcello: Were you simply assigned to the West Virginia, or did you volunteer for duty aboard battleships?

Grabinski: No, I was assigned; there was no choice. In other words, if you scored high in your test in boot camp and everything, you would be assigned a school. But not having the education, which I dropped early . . . and I played "hookey" quite a bit, so I didn't get the education. Not having the education, like most of the rest, I was just assigned wherever they needed boots. This is the way I was assigned to the USS West Virginia.

Marcello: And what particular division were you ultimately assigned to?

- Grabinski: I was in the First Division, which is a deck division. In other words, we had everything on the main deck that we kept clean and everything and also on the bow, which is what they call the forecastle; we had the starboard side of it only. In other words, that was where we were assigned. I was in the deck force.
- Marcello: What sort of a reception does a raw boot get when he comes aboard a battleship? Now you were out of boot camp, but you were still a "boot," so to speak, so far as the old salts were concerned aboard the West Virginia.
- Grabinski: Oh, well, they sort of looked on you, you know, and wondered, "Well, what the hell are we getting now?" In other words (chuckle), like I said, I was a skinny kid there, and some of them sized me up, you know. I looked scared, too. I wondered, "God Almighty!" You know, here I am, I'm nineteen; I just turned nineteen and wondering . . . you know, I mean, "What's ahead of me?" I thought of that, what was going to be ahead of me.
- Marcello: Do you have to take a certain amount of harassment when you go aboard?
- Grabinski: No, there wasn't much of that at the very beginning. It came later, you know; it came sort of later. Being a boot, they assigned you the worst jobs and everything else.
- Marcello: Describe the on-the-job training that you received here aboard

the West Virginia. You mentioned that you were a member of the deck force.

Grabinski: That' true. I remember very . . . I think it was a few days after that, but all we were doing the first few days . . . and I recall it because it left an impression on me, and that was that we were scrubbing the paint and scrubbing it; I mean, I thought it was clean, you know, and everything else like that. This is what we did. We swept.

What we did, also, every morning before breakfast and after reveille . . . and we slept in hammocks at that time. I mean, you had to get out of that hammock and have it made up and put all away, because in those spaces was where they set up the mess tables. Those things had to be cleared up, and then when we had that cleared up, we would go up on the forecastle and holystone those wood decks.

Marcello: Okay, now holystoning is a process that is no longer part of the Navy.

Grabinski: No, sir.

Marcello: A hundred years from now, it seems to me that people are not going to know what this is. So for the benefit of future scholars, what is holystoning, and how did it work?

Grabinski: Well, in other words, it's similar to a brick. It's a rough piece of . . . I'd say it's a brick. It's sort of coarse, and there's a hole in the center of it. In other words, they

would wet down the decks; there was nothing else but plain salt water. You had a handle, and you put it in the center of that brick or holystone--what we called it--and you just worked it back and forth. I mean, that would really clean that deck, which was teakwood, too.

Marcello: Essentially, you were taking off the top layer of the wood, were you not?

Grabinski: Right. The grime and any dirt or any grease that might have been there. We did that every morning before breakfast or before having our . . . and, I mean, that worked up a real good appetite, especially when you were underweight. When you came down, I mean, you could eat a . . . I mean (chuckle), I could eat a horse. In plain words, I could eat a horse or more. At that time, the food was sort of rationed, too. You got a portion, and that was it.

Marcello: Getting back to the holystoning again, after you had gone through this process with the stone and so on, what occurred then?

Grabinski: They would wash it down. Then you would swab it dry; you would swab it dry. Then here comes the swabs; you'd swab them dry. And we didn't have them buckets where you could rinse the swabs out; you did it in the bucket, in the hand. Then you just didn't throw that water out over into the sea; you poured it where it wouldn't fly back at you, and you

wouldn't dirty the area that you'd just cleaned up. Then we also, because of the salt water . . . the paint on superstructure and then again the brightwork, why, if any salt water got on it, here you got brightwork polish, and you cleaned that. We did that usually after breakfast if we were assigned topside . . . depending where you were assigned. But I liked topside because you were out in the weather, and you could see things that were going on; other ships might be in your area. In other words, I enjoyed being topside as much as I could.

Marcello: Generally speaking, how would you rate the on-the-job training that you received aboard the West Virginia? Was it excellent? Good? Fair? Poor? How would you describe it?

Grabinski: Well, in other words, they assigned you to another seaman, and he was your instructor; nobody else instructed you. So I was assigned to one fellow much older than I was, I'd say, maybe eight or ten years older than I was. So here we are scrubbing this paintwork. So as we were doing the job, I said, "How long have you been doing this?" He said, "For six years." That's when I realized that I'd just joined up for six years, and this is what I had to look forward to. I said, "Six years!" He said, "That's right. I've been cleaning this paint; I've been chipping it; I've been painting it; I've been scrubbing it." He was somewhere from Tennessee.



Just in conversations with him, I felt that I was in the same boat that he was . . . no education. Here we are in the deck force; here I am . . . six years I'm going to be doing this. I mean, that was the impression I got.

But at the time, you know, after that happened, I started roaming around the ship, and I found this ship-fitter's shop, which was right near our area. Because you didn't roam around the ship too much either; you were sort of restricted to the area where you were assigned, where you belonged. Because if you were roaming around, they would get on you about it.

So I roamed around, and I found the shipfitter's shop. I noticed these people working with metal, pipework and all that, sheet metal work. Well, it just so happened I went to a tech school, Erie Tech, in Erie, Pennsylvania; I went to the plumbing school there. So I said, "Well, this is the place for me." I was already sort of sizing things up.

"Maybe I can make a move somewhere."

Marcello: How long had you been on the deck force by this time?

Grabinski: I was already on the deck force, I think, oh, about three months. I was already on the deck force three months. But in other words, I was already sizing it up. I was already . . . I made seaman second class. I was an apprentice seaman at first. They automatically give you seaman second

class, but I was going up to seaman first class in the deck force. So I felt that I had to get seaman first class before I could make any kind of move. So I studied very hard. But like I said, I was scouting around, found this place, and kept watching that place for quite awhile.

Well, I made seaman first class on the deck force. Things were going pretty good. At that time, the boatswain's mate first class that was in charge of our division wanted to make a gun pointer out of me on the big guns--16-inch guns. At that time, I felt that if I got in that as a gun pointer, I would never be anything except a gunner, or I would be on the deck force. I didn't want any part of that, and for some reason I had the guts to tell him that I did not want to be a gun pointer; that was not the direction I wanted to go. So he said, "Is that right?" And I didn't know how powerful a first class boatswain's mate was that was in charge of the division.

The next day, after I told him that, he put me . . . I was assigned to the scullery. I was assigned . . . in other words, I was in a turret at one time just passing the ammunition, which was an easy job. But he put me in what they called the lower magazine where the powder was. I mean, that is in the bottom of the ship. So I felt, "Boy, here I go again. I'm at the bottom of the ladder once again. I'm in

the scullery; I'm in a lower handling room." So whenever we had a general quarters or anything like that, here I would be sweating, because it was steam and everything, up in the scullery. Then if I had to go to my battle station, which was the lower ammunition powder room, it was cold down there. So he really "fixed my turkey" for not doing what he told me.

So I just about completely lost hope then. In other words (chuckle), I felt, "Boy, I'll never get out of this." I was trying to figure how am I going to get out of it.

Well, it just so happened there was a lot of plumbing work that the R Division or the shipfitter's shop had to repair in the scullery, but it seemed like them shipfitters were never coming. So I went down there and got a couple of wrenches. I asked the chief, I said, "We got some leaks here."

And we didn't waste fresh water. I'd like to say something on that, too. We didn't waste any fresh water, especially underway . . . or anytime. So he said, "Well, can you fix it?" I said, "Sure. I went to a plumbing school in Erie, Pennsylvania." He said, "Is that right? Go ahead and fix it." So I fixed these leaks. It was just a union that needed tightening, and I fixed it. I looked around, and I seen some other leaks. There was a spigot;

I took it off; I reversed the washer on it, you know, and things like that. So I felt like I was doing something. At last I was doing something, but I was still in that scullery, in the deck force.

Then I started thinking, "Well, I'll go back and see this chief," who was the chief shipfitter. So I went over and seen him, and I told him who I was and where I was working. He says, "Yeah, I remember you." He says, "Well, I want you to continue to take care of everything in the scullery." In other words, he was getting his work done. But I agreed, I mean, I went along with it. I figured, "Boy, maybe he can do something for me." So I continued to do any repair work in the scullery. I had an "in" there, see. So this went on for quite awhile . . . oh, I guess several months. I know I was in it a long while, because I lost some weight in there, too, because of the heat. This was in the islands at that time; this was in the Hawaiian Islands. We were operating out of there.

So one day the chief came to the scullery and told me to put in my transfer papers. In other words, to get transferred from one division to another, you had to put it in. I knew my division officer wasn't aboard, so I said, "Well, my division officer isn't aboard." He said, "See your assistant division officer." So I made my transfer up.

I took it to the first class boatswain's mate. Of all people I had to face! I took it to him, and I figured, "Well, I'll never get transferred." But he said, "What do you want?" I said, "I'd like to get transferred to the R Division." He said, "Is that right?" He said, "You know I put you in that scullery in that lower handling room because I wanted you to be a gun pointer." His name was George, and he was from Alabama; I can't recall his last name. I said, "Well, it isn't what I want, and I'd like to get in the R Division." "What makes you think you're experienced?" I said, "Well, the chief thinks I'd be a good striker or an apprentice." All of a sudden, he says, "Well, I guess I can do it." He says, "I'll give you this break," so he signed it. He was the first one that had to approve it, because he had as much power, I thought, as, God, the captain. That was the first move.

So he told me at that time to go see the assistant division officer, because the division officer wasn't there. So I seen him, and I said, "Well, George said to have you approve it." So he approved it.

Then we had to go to the executive officer, and we had an executive officer on there that was the biggest man I ever seen, and the most ornery and the most regulation. In other words, everybody in the crew feared him. I mean, I

went there in the cabin where his office was, and I was actually trembling, because I feared that he was going to turn me down.

But there was a chief yeoman--I still recall his name-- by the name of Palmer, Chief Yeoman Palmer. Because of my name, invariably the name they hung on me was "Ski," because that ended with my name and I was Polish. He said, "'Ski,' don't worry." He says, "You're already transferred." I said, "What do you mean--transferred? I haven't seen the 'exec' yet." He said, "Well, I've got your papers all filled out, so he might ask you a few questions. Don't be afraid." So I went in there, and he says, "Chief Palmer, who's this?" "Grabinski, seaman first class, from the First Division wanting to transfer into the R Division." "Chief Palmer, are there any openings?" "Yes, sir." "Transfer Grabinski to the R Division." That's all it was. So my fear and everything was over, or I thought it was over.

Well, when the division officer came back . . . I think he was gone over the weekend or something, too; he was gone a few days. When he came back . . . we were in port then. When he came back, he came into the . . . I was already transferred in the shipfitter's shop; I was already working there. When he come back in there, he jumped this chief petty officer, who we called "Beamer" Hancock; his name was Joe

Hancock, and he was one of these old-time chiefs with a big stomach, crooked pipe--an old-timer. "Beamer" stole two men, really, from the deck force. He said, "Chief, I want those two men you stole back in the First Division." The division officer came over to me and the other fellow and says, "I want you two to transfer back to the First Division." Whew! Here I go again!

I says, "Chief, where's the transfer papers?" He said, "Forget it." He told me to forget it, and I forgot it. You know, I says, "The lieutenant told me to transfer." He said, "You're in the R Division now. You ain't got nothing to worry about." Well, after you think of it, this chief . . . this is the way he recruited his own men. You know, you can realize how he did it, because the chief at that time was always the backbone of the Navy; they ran everything. In other words, if the chief said something, he was just as high as the captain or anybody else. Everybody respected him, because they actually ran . . . and I found that out. This is how I found out that he had a lot of power. To get me out of one deck force over a lieutenant, which was really a big rank in the Navy at that time, too . . . for a chief to do that. So I remained in the R Division. I made shipfitter third class when I was on there, and I was shipfitter third class when the attack happened.

Marcello: Describe the on-the-job training that you received to become a shipfitter.

Grabinski: Well, at that time again, you worked with a petty officer, either a third, second, or first class. You were what they called a striker or an apprentice. They took you on-the-job, which was good training, because a lot of times, if you got a third class, he'd put you to work and watch you, and you would be actually doing the work, which by doing it you learn more rapidly than if he says, "Well, you do this and that." He just put you there and said, "Well, take this down," and all that, and you learned real rapidly. We did sheet metal work; we did . . . like if a glass in a port was broken, we'd replace it. In other words, it had to have putty around there to make it waterproof. Or any brazing job or welding job or burning job like that, well, we learned it right on-the-job with one of the other petty officers training us. The book work, you learned the book work by getting the book from the division officer from the library. That was what carried you, because you could be the best worker in your trade, but still the book work was what passed you. This is where I started to realize that I had to get in those books to make myself go.

Marcello: You're referring to the theory of being a shipfitter.

Grabinski: Right. Right. The theory. So I applied myself, and at



that time I said that as long as I was going to be in the Navy for six years, I was going to move up as rapidly as I could, study. We weren't getting paid but twenty-one dollars a month, but at the time I was third class, my pay was increased to thirty-six dollars. That seemed like a lot of money, and I thought, "Well, I'm doing pretty well." I'm trying to think of how much time I had in the Navy at that time. I know it was . . . oh, I know it was about eighteen months or less. So I did make it rapidly, and it seemed like my timing was just perfect when I made seaman first class. Then it wasn't very long that I could go up for shipfitter third class, and I made it at the first shot. That gave me the incentive that "I'm going to go higher. I'm going to continue to go higher."

Marcello: How rapid or slow was promotion and rank in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy?

Grabinski: Oh, it was very, very hard. Like I said, when I was in the deck force, that man that I was scrubbing that paintwork with, as I found out, was only a seaman first class, and he already had over six years in, you know. Occasionally, I would see him, and he was still doing it. So I seen that I advanced myself by making petty officer third class.

Like I said, that water, especially out at sea . . . in other words, when we showered, we showered like a bunch

of cattle, really. There were a few shower heads, and there was water hours for the fresh water. You would get a bucket of water--hope to get a full bucket--and you would scrub your clothes with it and also take a bath with it. In other words, you wouldn't waste anything. You'd get your clothes . . . but you would use the salt water to rinse your clothes off, you know, and things like that. It was the same way after you got the soap on. Sometimes you'd have to use salt water soap and salt water just to take a bath.

I mean, you rubbed with a lot of people up there where we took our showers. Like in the deck force, we had certain places where the First and Second Division would shower and wash our clothes at the same time. There were certain hours that you could take that shower. Boy, I mean, you better get in there. At times, it seemed like a good idea to a few of those sailors not to take a bath. But they learned real fast, because they would get the kiyi brush, the salt water soap, and they'd drag you in there. You took baths after that. We had a few what they called "stinkers" or "stinkies," you know, but they cured them real . . . these are the things that . . . in other words, the crew or the people in your division took care of those kinds of problems real quick if they had a man that wouldn't take a bath or any-

thing or wouldn't wash his clothes and all that.

And another thing is that you had to watch your clothes; somebody would steal them although they were stenciled and all that. Things like that were going on. In other words, you had to take care of your own clothes; you had to fold them, you know. We were living out of our sea bags at that time. We weren't entitled to a locker; that was another thing. The petty officers were, but we lived out of a sea bag, and then we finally got lockers. But at the beginning there, we didn't have . . . in other words, going back again, when I was in this First Division, they told me that hook and this hook is mine. That was my berthing space--two hooks to hang my hammock on. I mean, if you didn't get up, that master-of-arms had a stick and he'd rap that . . . those mattresses weren't too thick, so when he rapped that, you'd come rolling out of there. Or they would dump you out of it, and you'd hit that steel deck. So you didn't sleep late; you were up and out, see. I think I'm drifting away, though (chuckle).

Marcello: What was the morale like in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy?

Grabinski: To me it was good. It was very good, because I think a lot of us that were coming in that time realized it was opportunities in the Navy. In other words, they looked after us. We were fed; we were clothed. We were on a

cruise; here we are on the Hawaiian Islands, you know, and everything else. Most everybody felt it was a wonderful life, you know. I mean, they were very regulation, very strict; I mean, they were strict. You had to be in clean uniform, have a regulation haircut, and be clean-shaved.

That was another thing. Like I say, those washrooms were also for shaving and all that. I had sort of what you'd say was just fuzz; I didn't have too much. I guess I could get away with shaving once a week, but you shaved every day; you had a little fuzz.

They had inspections, especially on Saturday morning. We had what they called "field days" on Friday, and field day meant to clean that whole ship up. Then that's when you couldn't paint or anything; everything was scrubbed and cleaned, because the next morning the captain and the other officers would inspect the whole ship. They would check everything--even the beams--for dirt. These officers, they themselves were lieutenants sometimes for a number of years--eight, ten years--because their promotions were very slow, too. They knew . . . they were very clever in their ways of inspecting.

I remember one time . . . we were what they called the "dirty bucket brigade." They would never find the dirty buckets. In other words, the clean buckets were left with

the clean swabs and clean brooms; we didn't use those. They were only used for inspections. But the ones we used, there would be about six or eight of us hauling them and keeping clear of the inspection party. We wouldn't keep them anywhere in a storeroom or a locker. That was against "Hoyle" or whatever. In other words, these boatswain's mates and all that were clever, so they just kept it clear of the inspection party. We were carrying all this stuff--anything that they didn't want the inspection party to see, anything that was old or dirty, dirty buckets. The others were shining; they were new, really.

So one day I remember the lieutenant says, "One of these days, I'm gonna find where you keep these dirty buckets and dirty swabs." He says, "I still can't find them." Well, this George was a very clever man. He was the one that adopted that--that was when I was in the deck force--and we just stayed clear of him. He'd had some third class petty officer on the look-out, you know.

The inspections were very personal. That is where I learned to shine shoes, too; that was another thing about the Navy. To this day, I shine my shoes. One of the things that my wife said was that one of her qualifications for the man she wanted was if he had shined shoes. That was one of

the things that she would accept of him first. To this day, I hit my shoes a lick every day.

Marcello: Are you saying, then, that the strict discipline probably contributed to the high morale in the Navy during that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Grabinski: I feel it did, because we all knew that this was required of us. In other words, there was no period of ever letting that ship get dirty or something. In other words, you could eat off those decks, is the way you could describe it. You could sit down there . . . I could sit there with my white uniform and sit on it, and I know if I got up, I knew it was clean. I mean, they kept that ship . . . and this is what impressed me so much, and it still does to this day.

In other words, I think this is what sort of directed me in my life now. Because of it, I've used that same direction, or I've accepted those ways, and I've tried it in my civilian work and all that. In my Navy, I was very, very regulation. It was pounded into me, and I accepted it. I felt that it was the good way, because we had a team. By having that team, everybody knew where they stood and everything else. We were going to be a good . . . we had a good crew.

Marcello: What was the food like aboard the West Virginia?

Grabinski: The food was sort of what you'd say plain, but it was good.

It was better than what I was getting at home.

Marcello: Now was it being served family-style at the time you went aboard?

Grabinski: Yes, you sat at a mess table. The space that you used for your bunk is where they set up tables. They had what they called mess cooks that bring the food in tureens. We had stainless steel trays.

It didn't happen to me while I was in the deck force, but when I was in the R Division, until I made petty officer, you didn't realize how much privileges you gained by being a third class petty officer. This was what impressed me, too, because I felt that if you did work hard and you made your rates, then you were gaining all these privileges. So as a third class petty officer, one thing I gained was that they had a separate shower room and all the fresh water to shower in. It wasn't very crowded, because that's where the petty officers showered. The chiefs had their own separate shower rooms. So this is what you gained by becoming the petty officer.

Marcello: Sometimes mess cooking was a rather profitable job if you did a good job.

Grabinski: Right. Well, I was in the scullery, as I said, as a mess cook. That was similar to your mess cooking. Being a mess cook in a scullery, I did not get any tips. But the people

that brought the food to you were tipped, because that encouraged them to bring you the food fast, try to get extra servings. Because between the mess cooks and the cooks, there was what you would call a pay-off. The mess cooks would pay the cooks off to get extra food. So if our mess cook could get the extra food, we tipped him. In other words, we tipped them about fifty cents to a dollar a payday.

Marcello: Considering the pay, that was a pretty substantial extra income for those people.

Grabinski: It sure was. Some of those people would even want to stay on mess cooking, and some of them were on there for a year. Like I said, that wasn't the direction I wanted, and I didn't take it, and I was glad. Like I said, I didn't get any tips, because I was in the scullery. There was no way that anybody was going to pay me off to do their dishes. They were bringing all the stuff in there that needed to be cleaned, and there was no out. We had to get it done.

I recall one fellow that was assigned to the R Division. He was doing that for a year, and he was good because he would bring a lot of extra food.

Well, in the R Division, we were assigned . . . I think, it was eight or ten to the table; I think it was eight.



Whoever the senior petty officer was, he was the first one to get the platter or the tureen of food. So he would invariably, if we had pork chops or steaks which was occasionally, he would count how many pieces was on the tray. If there was eight or ten or more, if there were more than who was sitting at the table, he would take the extra ration. Of course, being the senior man, that was his privilege. I said, "Well, one of these days I'm going to get at the head of the line," because at that time when I got in the R Division, I was still seaman. So I got . . . everything was last.

Well, I recall one time we had . . . it was a bowl of pears, halved pears and the juice. This was for dessert. I noticed the first class petty officer down there, and he looked it over and counted it. The next thing you know, he had two pears in his plate, and he starts scooping out the juice that was in there, you know, one, two. So I'm wondering what's going to be left, you know. This happened numerous times, not just that time that I'm recalling now. By the time them pears came to me, which I was the last man on that table, my pear looked like everybody took a swipe at that half-pear. They chipped on it. I was lucky to get . . . in other words, it was clip, clip, clip (gesture); it wasn't a half-pear anymore. It was just a piece of a pear, but you

could see that everybody was taking a shot at that one pear. The juice, I was lucky to get a spoonful, if I got that.

So this is what impressed me to say, "Boy, I'm going to make first class petty officer as quick as I can, and I'm going to get at the end of that table and get that privilege." Because anything that we had, it was the same way. If we had mashed potatoes, what you'd think was a fair ration, why, everybody would take a bigger one. By the time that last man got it . . . and I guess that kept me skinny yet, see, So as I got to be third class, well, I think I moved about the third from the last to getting the food at that table. But see, I got that privilege, and that privilege meant a lot to everybody on the ship that wanted to advance. So that was that inducement. If you were on the ball, you studied, you advanced yourself, you were gaining more and more and more privileges.

Marcello: What were the quarters like aboard the West Virginia?

Grabinski: Well, as I told you, when I was in the deck force, I slept in a hammock--two hooks--and you just tied them up and you made your . . . well, that still happened to me in the R Division when I was seaman second class. But below me, the petty officers all had a cot. So when I made petty officer third class, shipfitter third class, I was entitled to a cot,

and I slept on a deck. In other words, you unfolded the cot. That was really sleeping good, you know. It was easier to make up and everything else. A hammock is quite a job to make up, because you had to make it up right, and then it had to go in the bin proper; it had to be stowed proper and everything else.

Marcello: What was it like sleeping in a hammock?

Grabinski: Oh, I enjoyed it, because if the ship was rolling, you'd swing, you know, and everything else. So I enjoyed it, because it just sort of rocked you to sleep.

But one time I went ashore. I was still in the R Division, but I still had a hammock. I went over and I got drunk and come back to the ship pretty late. In other words, nobody made up your bed or your hammock; you had to string it up. I mean, I was sort of wobbling around there. I finally got it hung, and I tried getting in it, and, boy, I mean, I wasn't making out at all. I'd just flip out, you know, and drop out again; I just couldn't get in there, because you didn't have any steps. There was a way of getting in there and a way of getting out, or you would dump yourself out. That's what I was doing. I was just in no position to get in there.

So I decided that as long as I couldn't get in there, I was going to make it up, put it in where they stowed the

hammocks, and I went to sleep there. Boy, I sure got a crude awakening, because right at the time I awoke, why, here everybody was throwing their hammocks in at me, and here I am laying in there, you know. I had to get out of there. This was what impressed me about sleeping on the ship.

But when I got that cot and the mattress, oh, that was another privilege that you gained because you were a third class petty officer. Again, depending . . . like, we had a shipfitter's shop, and in there on the work table, you could lay your . . . some of the fellows, especially like a third class or a second, would inherit the workbench and just lay his mattress there, and that's where he would sleep. That would mean he wouldn't have to open his cot. And the other petty officers would go in the shop, because up above you where I was sleeping in my cot, I didn't have that room. There were hammocks up above me. In other words, I'd have to make mine up and get clear of them, because these people with them hammocks . . . in other words, the messing and the berthing spaces were in the same places, and everything had to be put away before they set the tables down. The tables were still on the overhead in these spaces.

They told us we had the most modern battleship in the Navy at this time; the West Virginia was supposed to be.

And somebody told me that they had bunks and everything, but this was sure a lie. We still had those hammocks and cots and everything else like that. But like I said, after making petty officer, I inherited that, and that was another privilege I was able to enjoy.

Marcello: What part did athletics play in the life of the pre-Pearl Harbor Navy?

Grabinski: There were a lot of athletics. When I was in the First Division, at the time I was in the scullery, at the time I was in that lower handling room, I was pulling on oar on the second team of the First Division rowing team. By being in that scullery and around that water and pulling that oar and with all that sweating, my hands were starting to blister. Also, by being on that rowing team or the athletic team, you were extended some privileges. You were given . . . they had a special mess. In other words, at times you got steaks; you got a lot of milk; it was powdered milk, but you got milk; you got fruit and everything else. Because as an athlete and going out--this was on your own time, a lot of it--you were burning a lot of . . . you need a lot of strength. Because we were very competitive, you know, against the other battleships--boxing, wrestling. We had a gym on board there that you could go out and work out; people worked out in there. In other words, there was a lot

of that going on on board our ship as well as the other ships. This was good, because we were what you'd say in shape. I mean, they kept you in shape.

Marcello: It helped the morale, too, I'm sure.

Grabinski: It sure did, because we would have smokers, you know, boxing or the wrestling, and the pulling of the oars, you know. It was competitive between the divisions as well as between the ships. The West Virginia had a reputation of winning . . . it was a winning ship. They had the "Iron Mike," too, you know, that was a trophy that was given. One time we had one of the best boxing teams. And some of the officers . . . I mean, it wasn't only what you'd call the seamen or the sailors; it was officers and everybody else who were boxers aboard that ship.

Marcello: And I gather that everybody showed up when one of these events took place.

Grabinski: Oh, I hope to tell you! And then you'd root for either your division or your ship. In other words, that spirit was in you, because when anybody said the "Weevee" . . . we called our ship the "Weevee" for short. In other words, she was the "Weevee" to us. Prior to the attack one time, an incident happened. The West Virginia . . . we were out almost over a year, and we were due to go back to the States for a Navy yard overhaul.

We got word that we weren't going. In other words, they cancelled our trip back, and we were going to remain in Hawaii. At that time, no one knew the reason, but they told us the reason was because the Colorado had a burned out generator . . . USS Colorado, another battleship, was to relieve us, and we were to go back to Bremerton, Washington, for our Navy yard overhaul. We didn't go back, so when that happened, the crew was really . . . they were really dispirited because we were not going back.

A lot of us were not going ashore, because we knew we were going back to the States, so we were saving our money. Like myself, I was saving my money because I was going to go on leave all the way to Pennsylvania, and that took a lot of money to go back. So the crew was always staying aboard pretty close, because we knew we were due back.

Well, when that word come out, all of us--anybody that could go ashore--was going ashore. I mean, we were going over. In other words, our morale was really bad, and the word was, "I'm going over and get drunk! To hell with all this bullshit and this crap that's going on! I'm going over and raise hell!" I mean, those boats . . . had to even call more boats out because the crew was lined up.

We were inspected before we went ashore; that was another

thing. You didn't go ashore without the officer of the deck inspecting you. It was just an inspection almost as bad as the captain would give on the Saturday inspection. I mean, they would check you over good . . . even sometimes take your hat and look inside your hat to see if it was dirty. You had to have your liberty card and everything else. There was a procedure there.

I never seen so many people going over. I was among them. So we went over, and we pitched what you'd say a real good drunk! So at this fleet landing where all the boats were coming in . . . in other words, this is in Pearl Harbor at the time. We were tied up to the quays, and we'd have to ride our boat from the fleet landing to the ship.

Well, it seemed like, I guess, everybody in our crew must have waited for our last boat. But during that time, we were all drunk; we were going to start pushing some of these other sailors in the "drink." Somebody sort of started it, so we invariably that night . . . anybody that wasn't a "Weevee" sailor or West Virginia sailor, we were throwing them in. These boats had to come into the landing, and that Shore Patrol was hitting us with the clubs and everything, and they sort of settled us down. Then here was only one fifty-foot motor launch to take . . . I don't know but it must have been several hundred people or more.



Marcello: What you're saying, in effect, then, is that the crew aboard the West Virginia even brawled together.

Grabinski: They brawled together. And I mean we would pick people up, like two of us would grab somebody and get their feet and hands and into the water they'd go. We were mad not only with the Navy but with everybody around us, and we wanted to get that out of us. I know I wanted to.

And then we loaded that boat, and I mean everybody. And the drunks that were laying there, we would throw them in there. That Shore Patrol would say, "This boat isn't going to leave until some of you people get off. We'll send another boat." Well, a few got out. Boy, but that boat, I guess, held so many people, but there was a . . . well, these drunks that were laying in there passed out and everything, you couldn't get them out of there if you wanted to. So he just said, "To hell with it! Let the boat go back!"

So when we got to the ship . . . oh, boy! That officer of the deck calls out the master-at-arms force, and he wanted to put these people on report, especially the ones that were drunk and laying in there. (Chuckle) So that was a hassle, because we had to get up . . . they held us before we could go to bed, see. Nothing was really done about us. They took a bunch of names and all that, but I don't think anyone was punished. They figured that because of the situation, they

just sort of dropped it.

Marcello: What was the band like aboard the West Virginia?

Grabinski: Well, we had a real good band. Our ship had a band, and they were in a compartment after the First Division. I remember those people.

Marcello: Bands competed, too, did they not?

Grabinski: Yes, they did. They competed prior to the attack . . .

Marcello: "Battle of the Bands."

Grabinski: "Battle of the Bands" and the West Virginia's band was at the Bloch Center. Well, I wasn't there over that weekend, because I had the duty on board ship.

Marcello: At Bloch Center?

Grabinski: Bloch. It was named for an admiral.

Marcello: I see.

Grabinski: It was a recreation area. It was like an arena, and this was where all the boxing, the wrestling, or the "Battle of the Bands" would take place. We had a good band, because on our ship at one time there was a lieutenant from the British Navy that was on there that gave us lectures about the paint being too heavy on the British ships. We had a program on our ship about chipping that heavy paint. Our executive officer . . . the band sort of had privileges, too, but our executive officer says that that band couldn't practice until they'd chipped their paint. They had to chip it

and put on the chromite paint and repaint it. In other words, that band thought they had privileges, but not on our ship. They had to go to work like we did. We had a real good band, and they . . . I wasn't over there, but we were hoping our band would win. I don't recall the results of it or how it went, because I didn't go ashore that day.

Marcello: You're, of course, referring to that night before the attack when they had the so-called "Battle of the Bands."

Grabinski: Yes, that's right.

Marcello: When did the West Virginia finally move to Pearl Harbor on a more or less permanent basis? You might not know the exact date on this; you might have to estimate it.

Grabinski: Well, let's see, I think we . . . I'm trying to recall. I think it might have been around February in 1941 that we might have went out there. I can't recall. It seemed like time and everything at that time didn't mean anything. I think when we left Long Beach, we went up to Bremerton, and we went in the yard there.

Yes, we did go in the yard, because I was still in the First Division, and when we were painting the ship at that time, we had to scrape and paint the ship, which they don't do any longer. The band, they were the only ones that didn't do anything; they played while the ship . . . they were emptying the dry dock, and we were on floats, and we would

be scraping the barnacles and everything. My job at that time was the very bow on the starboard side, which was the First Division. I was in a boatswain's chair, because the way the bow angles there, I had to paint the starboard side of it--the gray part and everything. That was quite a job, because you sort of had to get swung in and just get sort of hugged in there in that area. I'll always remember that, because I'd always say, "Well, I painted that bow of that ship right there."

After our yard overhaul in Bremerton, we went to Hawaii. I think it was February of 1941.

Marcello: What did you think of the idea of going to the Hawaiian Islands?

Grabinski: Oh, I was elated! Here I am, underweight . . . "Boy, this Navy's what I want to do! I'm going to the Hawaiian Islands!" In other words, I was elated. If I had stayed in civilian life, it would never happen to me. Here a short time later, less than a year, I'm on my way to Hawaii. So when we got over there, it was very impressive.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about some of the training exercises and maneuvers that the West Virginia embarked upon after getting to the Hawaiian Islands. Let's describe a typical training exercise. In other words, when would you go out; how long would you stay out; what would you do when you went out;

when would you come back? I've asked a series of about four questions there. When would you normally go out?

Grabinski: Well, we would normally go out during the week--the weekdays, like Monday through Friday. Usually, we'd come in on a weekend, because that was . . . in other words, we were through our maneuvers. Maybe we'd would stay out two weeks, three weeks, but it would always be come into port on the weekend. Maybe Friday or maybe a Saturday, but always we'd return from an exercise on a Friday, and then it would be liberty.

Marcello: What would you do when you went out on these training routines?

Grabinski: Well, we'd hold . . . in other words, we'd hold different battle problems, you know, maneuvers. Sometimes this would put the ship in general quarters. We'd hold general quarters often as a surprise, you know; the routine of the ship would be gone. In other words, we'd be observing the routine of the ship, but then there'd be general quarters. Well, planes would attack us--dive bombers and everything else like that. When I was in the R Division, at times maybe our ship wouldn't be under attack, but we could observe the other ships.

These dive bombers would dive bomb on some of the ships, and several of us in the crew would say, "I'll

bet you that's a married man," because he would pull out of that dive before he should have. But then you'd say, "Well, there's a single guy," because, boy, he'd go real close to the ship and then sort of scoop up, see. But the married man would sort of go dip (gesture), and then he'd go up in the air again. But I remember that at times when we weren't involved with a problem.

But when those ships would steam out there, like the battleships, they would be in formation. You know, although we wouldn't be at general quarters at night, we would be in formation; we would be following one another, see. Then maybe you'd come topside, and they would be spread apart, you know. There'd be one on each side. Then at night they'd close in, see. In other words, this was nothing we had anything to do with; it was the bridge and the captain and their maneuvers. I guess they were practicing and all that, see.

When I was in the R Division, being in the R Division on short-range target practice, we in the R Division, which included the shipfitters, the carpenters, we would be on what they called target repair. A tug would tow the target, and after each time they fired, if we were on that target repair . . . and I was on it. We were on the tug Turkey at the time--that was the name of it. Boy, I thought I was the type of a sailor that never gets seasick, but we found

out that tug, when we got on it and it was towing them targets, it would just go up and down and up and down.

Marcello: You'd gotten used to that cozy life on those battleships. Those destroyer sailors always said you guys couldn't take those rough waters (chuckle).

Grabinski: Well, I found this out. In other words, I wasn't that much of a sailor when I got on a small ship, because our ship could take that sea real easy. When we were assigned to the target repair, we would have to leave our ship and go by launch to the Turkey. We'd go aboard, and they would have sandwiches and oranges and cookies for the crew that was in there. We invariably never ate that, and that crew on the Turkey knew it, see. I think they purposely at times would have that ship go slower so we would go up and down, up and down. And I mean I was sick! But we'd have to do, everytime our ship would fire at it, we would have to go in the motor launch and go to that target in that rough water and go aboard it and repair the target. I mean, you weren't sea-sick. I don't know how I got the strength, but I mean in the boat, out of the boat, you know. But as soon as we get on that Turkey again, and you weren't doing anything, oh, you were a sick man. Oh, not only me but everybody off the battleship, because we were not used to it.

Marcello: Where was your particular battle station aboard the West

Virginia?

Grabinski: I was in the repair party when I was in the R Division, which was repair three. I was back aft. In other words, they had the repair parties numbered, too, just like the turrets.

Marcello: I see.

Grabinski: They had one, two, three, see, and four. I was what they called repair three, which was back aft on a third deck. That was my station down there. In other words, my assignment in the R Division was . . . all the shipfitters and all, we had certain duties.

Marcello: You would have been a part of damage control in a way.

Grabinski: That's right. In other words, we were in the damage control repair party. If there was any damage done in a certain part of the ship . . . and whenever we had exercises, they would simulate these, you know. But when we would go into general quarters, usually like your ventilation and everything, it was shut down, and it would get hot in there.

One thing I was very thankful for was that I did not smoke. Because I seen many people that smoked what you would call . . . we would maybe be down there for an hour or more during an exercise or maybe two hours, depending on what exercise. They would have buttoned down in them spaces, and these people that smoked . . . I mean, you know,



it didn't bother me. But they would have a nicotine fit. I mean these people were all . . . you know, you could see the strain that they wanted the cigarettes, see. So at that time, I said I would never smoke because I felt that, well, if we ever did get in a war or anything like that, that I would be in that same condition. Maybe we'd be under that condition for quite awhile. I mean, these people would be sweating and nervous and . . . you know what I mean. You'd wonder what the hell was wrong with them, see. It looked like fear. I thought it was fear, but it was just that they needed that cigarette, see, because they were confined. A lot of them, you know, I guess, the confinement would get them, but none of that bothered me. But I noticed that.

We'd play cards down there if we weren't involved with an exercise. Maybe . . . we'd be confined . . . and I learned the habit . . . I was the one that had to open up the locker all the time and get some of the gear out, like battle lanterns and some of the tools. I carried certain tools, see. Well, whenever we'd have GQ, boy, I'd run and get down there first, because I'd break out the cards. We'd play pinochle, or we'd play cribbage, see, or we would play what they call an acey-deucey. I guess they now call it backgammon; we'd call it acey-deucey. So we'd get

down there, we'd want to get in the area where we could play. So I was always in the habit, boy, and I'd be down there (gesture) in no time at all. I was one of them . . . I'd get down there, and I didn't fool around.

But I would see people, you know, whenever we'd have exercises. I remember one fellow that was a wrestler on there by the name of Garcia . . . a big guy. He was one of these that, you know . . . he'd take his time about getting anywhere. He didn't take anything serious. Well, because he didn't take anything serious, he was one of the fellows that was killed during the attack.

Marcello: How much emphasis was given to antiaircraft training and firing during that pre-Pearl Harbor period when you went on these training exercises?

Grabinski: Well, they had the exercises on there. But we weren't involved with it, because we were down below; we wouldn't see a lot of it.

Marcello: But it is true, isn't it, that the West Virginia had many more antiaircraft weapons installed after Pearl Harbor than it had on board before the Pearl Harbor attack?

Grabinski: That's true. They didn't have many then when I was on it.

Marcello: I don't think many people really realized just what an important role the airplane was going to play in future years.

Grabinski: That's true. Because the battleship was what they called the

backbone of the fleet, that's the way we still thought of it. The West Virginia, well, that's "our" ship.

We always had the impression about the Japanese. We knew they were our enemy, because when we were in Long Beach there, their freighters were coming in and picking up that scrap iron, you know, and things like that. We'd have to ride from the landing out to the breakwater and go to our ship. But we had the impression that we'd take some weekend off and go out there and blow the shit out of them and just knock the hell out of them. We felt they were inferior and that everything about their ship was "Mickey Mouse," you know what I mean; that more than likely one good hit with our gun and we'd blow them out of the water. This is the impression we had--a lot of us had--because we thought we had the best Navy in the world.

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

Grabinski: Well, we called them "slant eyes" or "slope heads" and things like that, and we also had the impression they were small, you know what I mean. In other words, I think the impression was that "Well, if we went ashore with them or if we'd meet them on the beach, we'd just clean them up," you know; that was the impression a lot of us had. I know I did. In other

words, we'd first either beat them up with the fleet, or if they went ashore, we'd clean up on them there, too. We had that attitude about it. I know I did, and a lot of the crew on my ship did. They felt, "Hell, they're nothing." In other words they were just inferior to us, is the way I would best describe it.

Marcello: Did you have many sailors from the Asiatic Fleet aboard the West Virginia?

Grabinski: There was some.

Marcello: Did they ever talk very much about the Japanese?

Grabinski: More so about the Chinese. Because there was several . . . and you could almost pick those . . . what you'd call them?

Marcello: Asiatic sailors.

Grabinski: . . . Asiatic sailors out, because they would have a load of tattoos on them. They looked different; I don't know what it was but they just . . . in other words, well, you would say they were Asiatic.

Marcello: They'd been out there so long they looked like Chinese (chuckle).

Grabinski: Well, I guess you would say . . . no, they were a rough bunch. And they would have tattoos, and they were the older people. In other words, these were the type of guys that would volunteer for anything, because they didn't care where they went. They were the people, also, that

didn't make their ratings. You would see them, and they would look older, and they were older than most of the crew. They had a lot of time in the Navy, too. I guess whenever you were passed over--I mean, you didn't make your gradings and that--well, whenever there was a draft for the Asiatic Station, those were the people that kept going, you know. They would ship them out.

Marcello: I've heard some people say that these old salts had something called the "Asiatic stares." Had you ever heard that expression?

Grabinski: Yes. If they were around you or something, they would be that way. They were very quiet. Like I say, they were "oddballs." If there was anybody to get rid of, it was usually those people; they seemed like they were moving them around. If there was a draft to another ship, they would get rid of them. Invariably, we would then get some from that ship . . . in other words, they were bouncing them back and forth.

But you could spot them, you know what I mean, because they were different. I'm glad you brought it up, because I mean they were different, and they were a rough bunch. Because they would get drunk, and they were hard . . . I spoke of being regulation and everything. Now they were a rough bunch; they were always on report. They were fight-

ing, you know, and things like that. They were the problem more so than most of the rest of the crew. That group was always in fights; they were always drunk; they were always doing something. That was why they were the type of people that, you know, every ship didn't want them, and they would shift them.

So this impressed me, too, because I felt that I didn't want to ever go to the Asiatic Fleet, because I would come back looking like that, see, or be one of them, see. I still don't have a tattoo on me, to this day. I made a career out of the Navy; I spent twenty years in the Navy, made a career out of it. It never affected me, but it . . . you know what I mean. They were the ones that medically had all sorts of problems. They had what . . . in other words, they got back . . .

Marcello: All sorts of venereal diseases.

Grabinski: Right, and what they call the "Asiatic crud" and everything else. They were, what you'd say, a problem to the Navy, but that was part of the Navy, and I guess we all lived with it. They were free-spirited persons, though, but they were good men. At the same time, they were good men. You could depend on them. They were the hardest workers. We had a few in the R Division, you know, but they were good workers. I mean, they'd work and they were hard and tough. They were tough,

though, because they could drink their booze and everything else, and some of them people, even on board ship, were alcoholics then. If they could get after-shave lotion, they'd drink it, you know, and things like that. Or "torpedo juice," you know.

Marcello: What is "torpedo juice?"

Grabinski: In other words, it's called the "pink lady." That was the juice that was in the torpedoes, you know--things like that. Anything they could drink, they'd soak it in bread, you know.

Marcello: They'd soak it in bread to get the impurities out of it.

Grabinski: That's right. In other words, they were even distilling it on the West Virginia.

Marcello: These Asiatic sailors?

Grabinski: No, this was some of the first class petty officers on the West Virginia. One time we had an incident in the shop, you know. They were distilling; they had a little distiller, and it blew up on them. There was one of the mattresses there . . . they had it in the corner, and they caused a fire. Of course, the word was passed, "Fire! Fire in the shipfitter shop!" and it went over the speaker, too. So some of these guys grabbed that and put it on the cot and went up the gangway. We were underway, and they threw it overboard, because if we'd gotten caught with that, boy, I mean . . . you know. But they were making it. They came down there,

"What happened?" "Well, somebody was welding there and caught the mattress on fire, so they threw it overboard." But this actually happened, because I was in the area when it happened. I mean, they got rid of it. But they had a small copper distiller, and they was making it out of this alcohol. They'd get it in the sickbay or dispensary. It was a space . . . we had like a hospital aboard ship and a medical department, see, and they would bum it. Because on their . . . the shipfitters were . . . in other words, after you got in there, it was a group . . . in other words, you knew they were professionals in their trade.

So whenever we loaded supplies on there, too, that was another thing. We would steal a case of eggs, or we'd steal a can of ham. Then we had hot plates, and we would eat at night. We would always eat.

Say, like in the galley, they'd have the drain stopped up. We had a phone there, and the galley would call, you know, "Can you send a shipfitter up to unstop the drain. We got a stoppage." Well, if maybe I would take the call, I'd go up there and unstop it, you know. Well, the cook, because of that, would say, "Well, 'Ski,' what do you want? What kind of sandwich do you want?" I always loved pork chops, so I'd say, "How about a pork chop?" or "How about a nice steak?" So he'd give me a nice steak sandwich. But



you wouldn't go to the shipfitter shop or anywhere else. You'd go hide in the corner somewhere and eat that sandwich, because this is what you'd call "cumshaw." In other words, the cook figured that he shouldn't have been putting rice or something down that drain you know.

One day we had . . . oh, we had a mess there. We had to take sections. We had Chinese cooks on our ship, and when we had chickens, they would cut their heads, and they'd let that water run and everything down the drain . . . the rice. That would stop them . . . it stopped it up so bad, the drain lines, that we had to take sections out and take it to the garbage chute and just poke everything out and then put it in. Well, this one line came through this supply officer's office. We had to take it, and it stunk! Boy, that supply officer found this out and questioned us, "Why was this all stopped up?" We told him about . . . we showed him what was in it. It was chicken heads and legs and rice; you know, it was just jam-packed. Well, he called all them cooks and everybody working in the galley and said, "Look at all this!" He wanted to show them what they were doing wrong and not to let that happen again, see.

But like I say, these Asiatic sailors were a class to themselves. Like everything else on there, the deck force was a different group. The engineers were . . . they were

proud to be in the division they were in. Like the same as we in the R Division, we stuck together. Our friendships were . . . you know, being shipmates together. I just stopped off and visited with a friend of mine in North Little Rock for the past weekend and also some other Pearl Harbor survivors. He was in the R Division. The first time I seen him in thirty-five years was in Hawaii this last reunion (Pearl Harbor Survivors Association). We talked about a lot of things this past weekend.

Marcello: Now did the training routine change any as one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to get worse? Did your training routine change any, or was it business as usual so far as you could determine?

Grabinski: I feel that . . . see, now I'm in what you'd say the repair force. Ours was the same . . . it seemed like it was the same thing--general quarters or different conditions of the ship were . . .

Marcello: Did they perhaps call general quarters more frequently as one gets closer to December 7th?

Grabinski: No. To me, I don't think they . . . I feel that they didn't at that time. We would go out; we would have our routine exercises--fire drills and things like that--where we could have them, because the whole crew would be on there then.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that the training routine was a rather constant thing, and consequently it would not have had to be stepped up as one got closer to December 7th?

Grabinski: To me it didn't seem like there was anything coming up. In other words, we had no knowledge. In other words, our routine aboard ship was our daily routine, our exercises. They were all . . . it seemed like it was routine. We were doing this.

But one thing we did notice was our ammunition ready boxes. They would always have mats, and they would dampen them down, because it was hot. But I think the Friday or Thursday we come back in off of maneuvers prior to the attack, why, they stuck everything down below. They didn't keep the ready ammunition in the ready boxes.

Marcello: How many ready boxes or how many ready guns would there be when a ship came into port, let's say, on a weekend?

Grabinski: In other words, the ammunition would be in the ready boxes. You know, that was prior. They would have to wet these mats. They had these . . . well, I guess, hemp mats, you know. They'd wet them down, because they would get too hot. The gunner's mates did this. In other words, all the guns would sort of be ready for that, because the ammunition would be there. But prior to that, all of that was . . . the reason I'm saying this is because on that Sunday morning I had what

they called the security and the sounding watch. I was roaming around the ship at that time, and I didn't notice any of these mats that I had seen previously, because I'd stood this watch before. I didn't notice these mats over these ready lockers, which indicated there was no ammunition in them.

Marcello: I was kind of under the assumption that most of the ammunition was stored down in the magazines when the ship came into port.

Grabinski: No. No, in other words, it was prior to the attack.

Marcello: That's what I mean. Prior to December 7, 1941.

Grabinski: That was the only incident that I could recall. Because I had noticed that in previous times that we'd come in. And because I'd had the security and roaming the ship, I would notice these mats being on these ready boxes, what they called them. Because they would have to have them wet down, see. This was a problem. In other words, the deck hands didn't like it, because it would sort of spot their deck, and they'd have to keep swabbing it. I observed that more than anything. I mean, it come back to me. That morning, like I said, I was up at 3:30 a.m. on December 7th, and I didn't notice any of that around, you know.

Marcello: So in other words, what you're saying is that during that weekend of December 7th, the ammunition then was down in the magazines?

Grabinski: I think it was. What I am saying is that the mats were not on the . . . by not having them on there, there was no ammunition. They must have struck it below. In other words, not having any knowledge that it was or not, this was the procedure that I observed before. Like I said, even prior to some of these exercises, when I was in the First Division, we would be around some of those where you would have to get a swab and swab that water, see. And it made a very poor appearance.

Marcello: Now when the West Virginia came in, where did it normally berth?

Grabinski: We always berthed alongside a quay. In other words, it was what they called Battleship Row there alongside of Ford Island. But we always were tied to the quay. We would be there so long that the shipfitter gang or the R Division would have to hook up fire hoses from Ford Island for fresh water. We would get fresh water from Ford Island, so we'd have to string a lot of hoses. So our R Division officer and the engineering officer decided to lay pipes to the quay, and then all we'd have to have was a few hoses. Well, this time when we come in, what happens but the Tennessee got tied to the quay.

Marcello: The Tennessee would be inboard of you on that weekend of December 7th?

Grabinski: They would be inboard, right. They took our place. Boy, being on the detail for hooking up the hoses, which meant a lot of hoses again, we'd have to go and hook up . . . well, we were really mad with the Tennessee and wondering why they . . . because, see, we were there so long, we had that . . . in other words, we were what you'd say like a home-ported ship; we started to do things to make it easier for us. I recall that real distinctly, because all those hoses had to come out. We had shortened our work by having that pipe put in.

Marcello: I gather that Battleship Row was a rather impressive sight when all of them were in there tied up on a weekend.

Grabinski: It sure was. I'm going to go back to that morning, because it impressed me so much. I had the security and sounding watch. I got up at 3:30 in the morning to take over the four o'clock to eight o'clock watch in the morning; that was my duty for that morning, see. After I made my report . . . I made my rounds one time. Everything was normal--real quiet . . . beautiful night. I sat on the port side there and actually, you know, sort of reminisced and thought that I really did the right thing by joining the Navy for six years.

Marcello: Let's come back to this point, because this might be a good way to ease into the actual attack itself. I have one last

general question before we get to that point. What was the liberty routine like for the West Virginia when it would come in on the weekend?

Grabinski: On a weekend? I've been trying to think if we were in what they called three-section liberty or four-section. But I think it was three-section liberty, which means that two sections were eligible to go ashore, and a third of this crew would remain having the duty. Usually on weekdays, you'd have only one day. But on weekends, you'd either get tied up with two days, see.

Marcello: But even if you had two days of liberty, you had to be back aboard at midnight unless you had an address ashore.

Grabinski: Right. Right, that's true. Especially if you were below a petty officer, you could not stay ashore. Some of the ships had it, and some didn't. But with our bunch, you had to be petty officer to stay over after midnight unless you had an address.

Marcello: Why did they have the midnight curfew?

Grabinski: Well, for the simple reason there was no place to sleep. Occasionally when I'd go over--and I was a third class petty officer--at the YMCA in Honolulu, we would sleep on the billiard tables, because there was no room.

Marcello: And I assume they didn't want those sailors sleeping in the parks and things of that nature.

Grabinski: Roaming around. That's true. In other words, they were sleeping all over whenever they did stay over. There were very few hotels; there were only about three, I think--the Royal Hawaiian, the Moana, and the Alexander Young in town and the YMCA. But like I say, occasionally when I'd go over, and when you wouldn't want to go back to the ship, I'd just sleep on the pool table. That would get crowded at times, but they'd let us sleep there.

Marcello: What'd you do when you went on liberty?

Grabinski: Well, we'd get drunk. Before we'd get drunk, we'd do a lot of standing in line.

Marcello: Down on Hotel and Canal Street?

Grabinski: Hotel, Canal, and River Street. In other words, that was the only outlet for us.

Marcello: When you say "standing in line," for the record we're talking about houses of prostitution.

Grabinski: Yes, the whorehouses. We stood in line, because there was a lot of us in port that day. Not on Sundays, but I mean in previous times whenever the fleet would come in.

Marcello: Downtown Honolulu was wall-to-wall white hats.

Grabinski: White hats. And they were all over. So usually, it would be a line you would stand in. In other words, what we'd say was you'd either get a "piece of ass" or a "jump," see. In other words, that was the expression then.



Marcello: A "piece of ass" or a "jump?"

Grabinski: Or a "jump," you know, is the way they'd say it. In other words, for a lot of us, that was the only sex outlet we had. Some of the older sailors were making out with the local people, but they'd been around. But in general, the majority of us would have to go to a whorehouse and pay for it. They would even give you a raincheck if you couldn't "come off," see (chuckle). In other words, you were entitled to another "jump" when you come back. But they'd give you a raincheck, see. In other words, being young, I guess you'd say young studs, as we thought we were, you'd try to get one or two "jumps." Well, it catches up on you, so usually you'd end up with a raincheck. And they were good; these girls would honor them. A lot of the girls were from the States, you know.

Marcello: When you got a so-called raincheck, was this a verbal agreement, or did they give you a little token or something of that nature?

Grabinski: No, they gave you a little card, and it would tell you what . . . you know, like it was the Senator rooms or one of the hotels, you know. In other words, it would tell you the name of the hotel and the girl that you got the raincheck from, so you would be able to get a "jump" from her, because you're not going to get somebody else because

you already paid her. Then the price was two to three dollars depending on who you got. If it was some gal who was very popular, they would jump the price on you, you know, to three or four dollars, and they would be waiting on you. Other than that, why, there was always a line.

In other words, from standing in line in the street, you'd go up . . . some of the rooms were upstairs, so you were standing there. Then when you got into the waiting room where the girls would come, you know, then you wouldn't have much of a choice.

So a lot of us . . . well, I started getting wise, and I wouldn't go over on paydays whenever everybody else would go. I'd go on a dull day; I'd go over on a Monday or a Tuesday when everything was slow, see, because then the girls would come out and sit with you for a while. They'd give you a cup of coffee or a soda, and you'd start getting acquainted with them. That was a lot better, and then you weren't paying four or five bucks for it; you were getting it for a buck or two. So I started figuring, "If I'm going back to the States, I'm going to make myself broke here, you know, if I keep going over," so I wouldn't go over on weekends very much. And I wouldn't go on paydays for the simple reason that I'd wait until like a Monday and Tuesday when everybody else was broke.

Marcello: When was payday aboard the West Virginia?

Grabinski: Usually, it would be on the last of the month, I guess.

Marcello: So that means that you would have had a certain amount of money left on the weekend of December 7th?

Grabinski: Oh, yes, because a lot of us . . . I for one thing had money in my locker, you know, because of going back to the States, which I shouldn't have had. I was going to buy a bunch of gifts, so I thought as long as I was drawing out the money . . . and that was quite a procedure on payday, because the paymaster would have a gun there. You got paid one man at a time, and they would pay you in money; they'd dole it out to you. They'd tell you how much you had on the books and then ask you how much you would want to draw. So I drew quite a bit of my money after that incident of us not going back, because I was going to get some gifts to take home with me. So I said, "Well, I'll draw my money," and this is what I did. But we usually got paid . . . well, like I said, we got paid on like November 30th or the early part of December. So there was a lot of money afloat, because we got paid when we were out at sea, because we were out that week. So everybody had what you'd say a lot of money.

Marcello: Now a lot of people like to assume that if the Japanese or any other potential enemy for that matter were going to attack the military installations in the Hawaiian Islands,

the best time for them to have done so would have been on a Sunday morning. What many people assume is that Saturday nights were a time of heavy drinking and partying and things of that nature, and consequently the personnel would be in no shape to fight on a Sunday morning. How would you answer that assumption?

Grabinski: In other words, that was a routine each and every time and especially on the weekends. It wasn't so much on the weekdays, because like I said, most of them wouldn't have the money. But whenever they'd have that weekend off, them people would swarm over, get drunk, and I mean they would. Hangovers and everything else. If they were only over there on a Saturday, they'd come back . . . boy, I mean, there was a lot of what you'd say vomiting and puking and everything else. In other words, these sailors were . . . especially on our ship, you've got to think back and remember that we were still dispirited because of being turned down. Our crew was more dispirited than, I think, the others, and they were drinking, and they were being the free-spenders.

Marcello: That's an interesting point that you bring up, and I think it's an important one.

Grabinski: They got to be free-spenders. In other words, they had the money, and they were going over and getting drunk and having a good time. In other words, if we had anything going on,

say, a problem on the ship, it would be something to get them rounded up, especially on a weekend. It would be a slow reaction because of the condition of the people that'd been over, and especially, say, a bunch that went over on a Saturday. Then on Sunday . . . that morning they got to get up, but then they get out and go somewhere else, you know, I mean, lay down somewhere because they're working off that hangover.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us, then, to that weekend of December 7, 1941. What I want you to do at this point, Mr. Grabinski, is to go into as much detail as you can remember about that weekend. Let's just start with the time when the West Virginia came in from a training exercise and docked. Would this have been that weekend of December 7th?

Grabinski: Yes, it was. It was a Friday that we come in; we tied up.

Marcello: That would have been December 5th.

Grabinski: That was the 5th. We come in on the 5th; I think it's either the 5th or the 4th. I'm not sure of that, but it seems like it was a Friday that we came in on. The Tennessee was already tied up to our berth, and we tied up alongside of her. That day I really didn't have the duty, but I . . . in other words, a lot of the people that had liberty were already getting dressed and getting cleaned up to go ashore. The duty section was assuming a lot of the . . . you know,

tying up the ship and securing the ship to be in port, you know. The engine rooms and all that were going to be getting secured. So the duty section would be doing that.

So I, for one thing, volunteered to help with the hose detail for the water hook-up, the fresh water hook-up, because I wasn't going ashore. I knew I had the weekend duty. So that day, I recall, we hooked up the water, and we were really angry with them, you know. We had some words with the people off the Tennessee because we had to go over there. Even while we were there, we had to roll our hoses over their ship and things like that. We said we'd tear that damn fresh water pipe down, you know, because it was all ours, see. We were bitter about it. You know, that's that ship's spirit again.

That Friday, we had mail . . . everybody catching up on their mail. It seemed like it was what you'd say a slow day. It just settled down; when you got into port, everything just sort of settled down. The activity was less, because there were people ashore.

Marcello: What did you particularly do that Friday? Nothing at all?

Grabinski: No. Well, I read my mail. One of my sisters tried to keep me informed on what was happening in Erie, Pennsylvania. She subscribed to the Erie Times newspaper. In other words, I was getting the newspaper from home. That mailman, I know,

called the shipfitter's shop and says, "Get that goddamned Polack down here to pick up all his mail!" Well, with all those newspapers, he must have had a half a sack of newspapers, see. You know, they finally caught up with me, and he says, "Get them goddamned newspapers!" In other words, there was a daily paper and a Sunday paper coming to me from Erie, Pennsylvania. I guess the ship must have come in, and the Lurline did come in prior to that week or something, because I think I seen her somewhere . . . you know, the Matson Line. So he says, "And I hope you choke on them papers!"

So I was reading a number of those papers; I had to catch up on the newspapers (chuckle), and I had quite a few. To my surprise, the girl that I was going with in Erie, Pennsylvania . . . I wrote her because I thought at the time I wasn't coming home. You know, when I wasn't coming home, I told her I was breaking off, and I figured I would never get to Erie in a couple of years. Then I figured if I did go back, she'd want to get married, and that would hinder me so far as my thinking about progressing in the Navy. I seen too many . . . that was another thing. There were married men in the Navy, you know; they were only seaman second or third class and having families. Well, seeing the situation they were in and the pay that they were getting, I felt, "No married life for me!" So I wrote her and told her to, you

know, go off and all that. Well, when I was reading the paper, here's a picture of her. She got married. So I said, "Well, that didn't take long" (chuckle). So it was a picture of her in her wedding dress. I said, "Well, I don't have anybody in Erie now for sure."

So I read those papers quite a bit, and that gave me . . . well, I read them from Friday, Saturday, and I even read them when I had that watch. You know, early in the morning, I was looking at them. I kept a few of them, and I looked at the job situation and everything. Boy, there was no work then either, you know; the jobs were very scarce. This is what I did sort of Friday.

Like I say, I was assigned to watch Saturday and Sunday. But the Saturday one, I had it during the daytime, see. But most of that security was at night anyway, and we had to check the soundings, see. That's to check the tanks with a sounding rod to see if anything's leaking in them, see. That's the voids and stuff like that, cofferdams. In the R Division that was our responsibility, and usually it was the third class that always got the sounding watch.

So Saturday, like I said, was a routine day, but it seemed to me like a lot of people were off that ship. There wasn't that heavy traffic that you usually see during the day. And it was early like Saturday.



Marcello: Was there any sort of an inspection on Saturday?

Grabinski: No. No, we didn't have an inspection that Saturday. In other words, that was unusual, too. Or was there? No . . . no, because it seemed like on Friday it went into that holiday routine, you know. Some of the people had what they call a seventy-two-hour pass. See, they left on Friday, you know. If they were able to arrange it where somebody took their duty Friday and they had the weekend off, see, they'd get a seventy-two-hour pass. To me, like I said, Saturday seemed like . . . well, I was reading them papers, and I noticed there was hardly anybody around.

Marcello: Now there would have had to have been one section aboard the West Virginia.

Grabinski: Yes, right--one section or one-third of the crew. The crew was about 1,500 or so. It seemed like we were getting more men. That was one thing; we were getting more men on it. Our crew was being built up, if anything. And we were wondering, "What the hell we going to do with all these people?" You know what I mean--the space and all that. It seemed like the chow . . . because of the more people that were . . . it seemed like we were getting more men toward the . . . I don't know what period of time it was, but it seemed like you weren't getting the rations you were getting maybe like four months previous. It was sort of getting down; they weren't

getting as much food because of the more men that were being assigned the ship. It seemed like a draft of men were coming every so often. You'd see a boat, and you'd see them guys carrying all that . . . what I'd say luggage . . . their personal possessions, see.

Marcello: Okay, so Pearl Harbor kind of drifts into that Saturday night of December 6, 1941. You were aboard the ship. Did you see anything unusual that night?

Grabinski: No.

Marcello: Any more loud drunks than usual coming back aboard?

Grabinski: Yes. Yes. Even while sleeping . . . like I said, I'm on a cot. In other words, in these berthing spaces there's only a narrow passageway. Very noisy, drunk, boisterous, fights, you know what I mean . . . master-at-arms, you know, getting them quieted down. On Saturday night, it seemed like I was getting awake more so than ever, because like where I was sleeping was really aft of the Second Division. All those deck hands would have to go by that way, you know, past that. See, we were more in the forward part of the ship. Then back farther . . . in other words, after they came up the gangway on the port side and then when they came into the ship itself, well, when they're in there, like a compartment or space, it echoes, especially when the ships is quiet and dark. It seemed like I was being awakened quite a bit, and

I'd roll over and use the pillow, you know (gesture) to muffle out the noise. I was trying to get some sleep.

Marcello: You did mention previously that you were doing a little bit of reflecting that particular Saturday night. Why don't you pick up that story and comment on it?

Grabinski: Okay, this was really December 7th at 3:30 in the morning when I was first awakened for me to take over the security and the sounding watch. I got up that morning, and I'm very easy to get up, because the man that woke me said, " 'Ski,' time for your watch." So I got up, and I made up my mattress, because we had a bag to put it in, and made up my cot, and we had a bag to put it in and stowed it in the proper storage area.

I got up and relieved the watch, notified the officer of the deck that I assumed the four to eight watch, and then I started to make my rounds. This was around four o'clock, my first round. You know, everything was very quiet on the ship at that time. It seemed like it was easier to get around the ship. There weren't as many hammocks strung up. Usually, you ducked. The cots, you know, you're sort of working yourself around them. Sometimes some of the people in the past would have their cot right near a sounding tube or something, so you would have to move it or move them, see. But this didn't happen that day.

So after I made my first round, made my report to the officer of the deck, I went on what they called the boat deck where they stowed the boats and where also the anti-aircraft guns are. Like I said, at that time when I was roaming around there, I did not see these wet hemp . . . sort of rugs or whatever you want to call them; I didn't see that.

So I sat there, and it was a nice, beautiful, cool night . . . real beautiful. That's when I started thinking. Well, the girlfriend got married on me; I told her not to wait for me. I thought, "Well, boy, this is the best thing that ever happened to me. Here I am; I'm in Hawaii on a big battleship, a ship that I'm very proud of. I'm progressing very good; I'm already shipfitter third class." In February I was preparing to go up for shipfitter second class. I'd been studying hard, and I says, "I'm going to make it." At that time, that's when I also said, "I'm going to stay in the Navy for twenty years, too." You know, I made the decision there. I says, "I'm going to stay in this Navy, because it's been good to me and good for me." In other words, it gave me the chance that I hoped I could get out of life. In other words, "I have advanced; I've become a petty officer. I have gained so many privileges the other people on this ship didn't have, and I am enjoying this."

I had what I would think was the best in life that I could have at that time. I had money in my pocket. I could go ashore and get a "piece of ass" if I wanted to, you know, get drunk, you know. I was enjoying life. I says, "I'm sure very happy that I did this, because I don't regret one moment of it." And I said, "That six years aren't going to seem that long, and neither is twenty."

So I noticed all the ships; I mean, they were lit up like these yachts maybe you've seen somewhere. The gangways had . . . all the battleships had lights to the gangways. There were stringing two strings of lights. Electricians would always hook that up on all the ships. Then they would have some around the quarterdeck there. I mean, it was . . . you know, and the reflection on the water, you know. I mean, I walked all over, and I was amazed. I said, "What a beautiful night!" The sight was unbelievable. It sparkled; it just amazed me.

And all those ships! That was another point. This was more ships than I'd seen in a long time that were in harbor. On previous times that when I had the security watch and was roaming around, this impression wasn't there.

Marcello: Were the battleships all usually in on a weekend?

Grabinski: Most of the time. But there was more so this time, because we all didn't ever come in. This time there were more. There

were more ships; there were more sailors. In a sense, I says, "I'm glad I have the duty, because this isn't the time to go over. Like I say, more than likely to get a "piece of ass" would cost you maybe ten bucks, because there was so many of them in there.

Marcello: Okay this brings us, then, to that Sunday morning of December 7, 1941. Once more, I want you to start your routine on that particular day, and then we'll proceed right into the attack itself.

Grabinski: I think I brought up that I was on security and sounding watch. In other words, I roamed around, noticed how beautiful everything looked, and reminisced about being very thankful and happy that I joined the Navy like I did and the reasons I gave. In other words, everything went along peacefully. The routine of the ship commenced; reveille went; our breakfast went on routinely. In other words, it was Sunday breakfast.

Marcello: You probably ate a fairly early breakfast, did you not, since you were already up?

Grabinski: No.

Marcello: Oh, you didn't?

Grabinski: No, we don't get what you call early breakfast. You eat when everybody else eats. Although you get up early for a watch, it has no difference in there. You ate afterwards.

In other words, you had a cup of coffee, and you'd go maybe to the bake shop. If they were baking or something, you'd bum a doughnut or something there. Or if the cook was in the galley . . . because we used to roam around those spaces.

But previous to that, the laundry aboard ship had a breakdown in it. There was a lot of laundry around. So in my roaming around, there was some of our duty shipfitters working on the equipment. They were working that morning, which was a Sunday morning. When a breakdown like that happens, you have to keep on it because the laundry was sort of stacking up. I went by there earlier, a few times to see if they needed any help and "batted the breeze" with the fellows while they were working, and the laundry guy. I said, "Boy, you're going to have a lot of laundry to catch up on." All the divisions would have their laundry in a big canvas bag, and that's where they . . . in other words, you hauled it over to the laundry whenever the division had an assigned time and date to have it done. There was no cost to you, either, at that time.

So I roamed around--routine. In other words, all the decks were cleared--the mess tables . . . there was nothing. The ship was sort of what you'd say set up for the rest of the day until dinnertime.

I did notice there was hardly anybody around, it seemed

like. On Sunday that's the way it usually is, but it was still a different feeling like there were . . . I didn't pass many people or something. I was roaming around; I didn't see many people. So to me, that indicated that there must have been a helluva lot of people ashore from our ship, too.

So I went in the shipfitter's shop, which was sort of between a couple of turrets there--caged-in outfit. In other words, it's restricted to everybody else except for business or just the shipfitters. So I went in there and was having a cup of coffee. There was a first class shipfitter by the name of Ray; he was sleeping on his mattress on a work table, and I was having a cup of coffee. See, usually the master-at-arms would make everybody make up their bunks. They wouldn't come in there . . . in other words, we had a "drag" with them. So he kept on . . . because he had quite a hangover. He was sort of flaked out yet.

So the phone rang in the shipfitter's shop, and the guy in the laundry said, "We got the R Division laundry done. We got it done first, because you guys worked on the equipment. Do you want to pick it up?" I says, "Okay, I'll be right over," you know, having nothing to do at that time, too. I was going to be coming off watch. Usually



what we'd do, we'd fold our . . . whoever got the laundry and whoever was aboard, we'd sort the clothes, because they were stenciled, and you know, pile them up. As the men would come back, they would pick them up.

So I went over and got the bag, which was on the starboard side aft. I had just come in between where my locker was, what they call a passageway, dragging that bag. I didn't have a white hat on, because usually inside the ship, you never wore it, see. But I had this bag, and I had to drag it because it was pretty heavy.

All of the sudden the word went, "Away fire and rescue party!" Having the duty, I had an assignment to the fire and rescue party. So I dropped the laundry bag. I was on the port side already; I dropped it there, went to my locker, because I had to have my hat because I was going to muster on the quarterdeck, see. I got my white hat, and I went on the port side of the ship on the main deck, passed the supply office. As I got through the opening of what you'd say the compartment where there would be a doorway, I just went out, you know.

The word came out, "General quarters! General quarters! Man your battle stations!" But I was out there enough to where I'd seen a plane bank . . . bank up. You know, I'm surprised like anybody else. "What the hell's going on?"

In other words, you're just surprised wondering what the hell's going on. "Away fire and rescue" and now GQ.

Marcello: "Away fire and rescue." Was it unusual to have this particular call on a Sunday morning?

Grabinski: No, because this could happen anytime. This is what we were trained for. Say another ship was on fire. We as a team would go over . . . and, you know, we have pumps and everything else, fire hoses. We would help put that fire out. So what must have happened at that time is that they were bombing Ford Island and these planes and everything. I didn't see that, because I was facing what you'd say aft on the port side on a main deck. I just got out of the inside of the ship.

Like I said, I seen this plane bank, but I seen a "meatball." It looked different. But it still didn't strike me as to what was happening. There was no way I could identify it. It was just a plane to me. So because I was always in a habit of getting to my station, I just dropped down a ladder to the second deck, and I was almost down to the third deck, and I was at my repair station--repair three--within minutes.

Marcello: Now at this time, did you observe whether or not everybody was acting in a professional manner?

Grabinski: There was nobody around that I seen. In other words, like

I said, here I am, I'm coming from the laundry. I went to the laundry; I come back; I dropped that bag in that area; and working myself along the port side, I didn't see a soul. When I seen that plane, I'm wondering, "GQ!" Of all things! GQ!" So I dropped down--I don't run into anybody--and get down to my station, which is on the third deck.

Marcello: In the meantime, you have heard no explosions or anything of that sort?

Grabinski: No, no, nothing. There was no . . . in other words, I'm inside the ship; I run down the port side and work myself aft to my station. As soon as I get there, I open up the repair locks, get the battle lantern out, get the tools out, you know. This is what I'd been trained to do; I've got it ready. I was even thinking about the cards, but for some reason I didn't get the cards out to play somebody (chuckle). God, I was down there already, and there was nobody down, it seemed like, for quite awhile until . . . you know, I mean, they were coming sort of slow.

By that time, the lights went out; the ventilation went out. It's pitch-dark. Well, I got the battle lanterns out, started turning them on. People are drifting down in there. They are creeping down there, really, now.

Marcello: Are they bringing any stories down to you?

Grabinski: No, nothing. "What the hell's happening?" and everything

else, see, because all of the sudden the lights are out; the air is off. I mean, it's pitch-dark except for our emergency equipment.

So there's so many of us in there, you know. Well, this first class shipfitter by the name of Rucker, he said, "The goddamned Japs are hitting us!" He's the first one, you know. "What the hell are we gonna do?" he says.

Marcello: All you can do down there is stand-by.

Grabinski: Right. There's nothing else we can do because usually we have what they call a repair officer in charge. Well, we try hooking up the phones and all that. Well, they're dead, too. There's nobody to give us any orders, but we're down there on the third deck not knowing . . . except we know it's the Japs, because Rucker says, "Goddamn them son-of-a-bitching Japs hit us!"

Marcello: But you have felt nothing like being hit or anything of that sort.

Grabinski: No, not at that time, because we were aft, you know, away from . . . in other words, we were aft; there was nothing that we could feel or anything.

Marcello: What would have caused your power to go out?

Grabinski: Our engineering spaces must have been hit.

Marcello: But you still didn't feel anything.

Grabinski: No, we didn't feel anything at that time. But I'd say we

were sort of milling around there wondering what we were going to do. Well, Rucker was going to wait for one of the officers to come to give orders.

Okay, at that time, shortly in that period, it felt like an explosion, and it felt like our steering sort of went out. But it don't feel like our ship. See, we don't know what happened, but it felt like our ship, you know, sort of . . . I mean, you know, it gave it a lunge. It just bounced back,

Marcello: Was it enough to knock you off your feet or anything of that sort?

Grabinski: No, no, no. It was sort of a light thing. It didn't seem like it was hitting our ship, but it might have been an explosion somewhere to cause us to sort of raise enough. Then Rucker said, "Well, goddamn, we've got to do something!" He said, "'Ski,' get the lantern, and we'll start flooding," you know, the voids and all that because we were getting the list already. See, our ship started to list.

Marcello: Which way was it listing?

Grabinski: To the port. In other words, it was listing to the port, so Rucker says, "We better start flooding." I'd say there was either six to eight men in there, and he sort of took charge. He said, "'Ski,' you come with me." See, being his striker at that time, he knew me, and he says, "You get

the lanterns," and he took a couple of wrenches and all that. We started to work down that third deck, because that's where all the controls are.

Marcello: Now this is a first class petty officer that has taken charge.

Grabinski: This is a first class petty officer. He took charge, so here we're proceeding.

Marcello: A competent man? A man in whom you have a great deal of confidence?

Grabinski: Oh, yes! I mean, this is one of the men that I have a very high respect for. In other words, I hope to be like him, because he's had me under his wing, see. In other words, whatever he said I'm ready to do, because he knows what he's doing. He's been around these voids and cofferdams and all this flooding, you see. We did that once in a practice run, so he knows all about it. To me, I wouldn't have been able to do it if I had to, but I would have tried, because what it would have meant was open up the valves to get some water in that bottom, see.

Well, we started to do that. We were down there, and we were working by ourselves. It was a slow procedure, because it was dark, and we had that . . .

Marcello: Did the battle lantern give off much light?

Grabinski: Well, it wasn't that much. You didn't want it too high on there, because it would go in their eyes. I stood sort of

back a little ways so they would have more light. As they were moving, I would move along, see, as they were working on it. I wasn't working on the valve; him and somebody else was. As I was moving, they would move down. We went sort of forward--I don't know how far forward--but it seemed like we were there quite awhile.

We come to another group . . . several men that were coming from forward, and Rucker was talking to them. I was sort of more in back with the lantern, because I wanted to give them the light. He told me to stay back anyway and give them some light. They talked; they already got everything forward. So okay, Rucker says, "We're going back to the repair party," so we headed back.

Marcello: The counterflooding has already begun now.

Grabinski: It's already begun now, but there's quite a list. So we get back to what we call our repair party. So again, there was no officer. Rucker says, "Well, hell, there ain't nothing we can do here! Let's get the hell out of here!"

There's no water down in the third deck, but as we're coming up to the second deck, that is completely flooded because it's listing. Our ports were open. We had ports at that time, so that water rushed in there. That water was coming in first, but it didn't come in the third deck in our area, because we had it isolated. We were closed off,

so no water got there. But when we were coming up on the starboard side, well, the water was almost near this hatch we were coming up, see. That water was really pouring in.

So we went up another ladder. In other words, we came to the second deck; then we come to what they call the main deck or the quarterdeck area, you know. We're exposed; we're outside the ship now. This is where everybody's coming.

Marcello: About how much time has transpired since general quarters sounded?

Grabinski: I would have no knowledge. I would say anywhere from a half-hour to an hour or less; I would say that. Because as we come out, this is when our eyes opened up. You look over there, and this Arizona is all afire, and it don't look like a ship. You know, it's a hunk of . . . it's just all blown up, see. And this oil is all afire . . . black smoke all over. On the port side, we got a list, but we're coming in this area, because there's oil around and there's water. We can go over to the port side, but we're over here to the starboard side back aft. There's a bunch of us coming from below decks milling around, because this is the only safe area to be in. There's no other place to go in. We're in this area.

Marcello: How far were you from the Arizona?



Grabinski: Well, I would say several hundred feet. In other words, she was at the next quay; she was inboard. Then there was a repair ship tied to there before, but there was no ship there. I thought it was sunk, too. It was the repair ship Vestal. I knew it was there, because just looking around at the ships that were in earlier that Friday and Saturday, she was tied alongside the Arizona. God! I mean, you wondered, "What the hell happened here?" In other words, everybody that's coming from below decks is sort of assembling in this area; it's on the starboard side aft of the . . . in other words, we're not in the ship; we're coming out of the ship. Everybody's coming in that area, because elsewhere it's on fire, or it's heavy black smoke or the water on the port side--there's no way. So we're all herding ourselves in that area. Then, you know, just looking around what I seen there, like I said, the Arizona and all this black smoke coming out of it and the flames and the fires and all that. You want to . . . in other words, I'm not scared or anything; it's just amazing what the hell's happening, you know. You still can't recollect what's really happening.

Okay, all of the sudden, there's one plane flying by . . . way high, a bomber, you know, just one plane by itself. It's flying over. The next thing . . . we looked

up. The next thing you know, on our number three turret-- we stowed our scouting plane on there--whatever it was, a bomb or a projectile, it hit that plane, you know. The debris was flying around and set it afire, and that projectile, where it went at that time, we didn't know. We scattered, you know; we just scattered, lay down. It seemed like everybody was automatic; they didn't want to get shrapnel or anything. We were trained to lay down, you know; we all hit the deck.

Marcello: How far from you did this explosion occur?

Grabinski: Well, it was the number three turret, which is a high turret, you know. In other words, the barbette is up, oh, I would say . . . in other words, it was the very top of it, and we were in this area, oh, within, I'd say, fifty or less feet of us. But there was no explosion; it was just the debris from the plane, and it caught on fire. It must have been the aviation gas in there, but it caught on fire. So we all, like I said, scattered and lay down. There must have been eighty or more people in that area.

Okay, we got up, and we're looking around. "What the hell are we gonna do?" So some of them were jumping in the water. I'm trying to see . . . and we've got quite a list on there then. It hasn't been pulling us over, but we got quite a list on us. The Tennessee hasn't had . . . you

know, the ship itself, their crew, hasn't done anything to help, you know. Here we are, helpless there; we can't do anything. We should get the hell out of there.

So I'm looking around, and I see the lines, the wire cables that are tying us up, which is up on a boat deck. So I'm going to go. Here a sailor bumps me and says, "Don't leave me! I've got some oil in my eyes!" It was burning his eyes. "I can't see good." I said, "Okay, don't worry about it; I'm not going." I said, "But we can't go in the water in your condition!" People are going in between the ship just jumping in the water. They can't get over to the Tennessee. There's no way, because they're like this (gesture), and we're sort of listing. There's a gap in between; there's no way you can get over.

But I seen these lines, so I says, "Come on with me! Hang on to my back there! Just grab ahold of me!" I said, "I'll walk slowly with you." So we went up this ladder, up the boat deck, over to them lines, and we got on. He could see enough to where he could bounce on. I got on first . . . yes, I got on first. Then I dragged him, you know. I held onto him. I said, "We'll bounce together," so we bounced over these lines, got on the Tennessee. Their ship is similar to ours.

Marcello: Now were you going across these lines hand-over-hand?

Grabinski: No, we sat on the line.

Marcello: I see.

Grabinski: We sat on it and just bounced, you know. No, we didn't hang on it, because, see, of his condition with that oil burning his eyes. So each time we bounced, we'd go together and bounce.

Marcello: Has the abandon ship order been given aboard the West Virginia?

Grabinski: No. There's no communication whatsoever. In other words, the word was, "Let's get the hell out of here!" There was nothing we can do, because that's a dead ship to us. In other words, we're going to get out of there, because what if another bomb or something comes in? We're hopeless. The avenue was either in the water or stay where you were. And I'm going to beat myself out of there somehow, so that's why I crossed over on them lines. No, we sat on it and just bounced over. There was quite a strain on it, because it was holding the ships together.

So we got over there, and I went over to the first aid station, and I said something about the dispensary earlier. It's what we called the sickbay; I recall it now. I knew I couldn't get him to the sickbay, because there was more than likely too many wounded and everything else there. So I went to a first aid station; they've got them throughout the ship, see. There's a pharmacist's mate that's in that area. I brought him there, and there were other people

laying on the deck, too, that were wounded. So I asked the pharmacist's mate, "What can I do? Can I help?" He said, "Yeah. Here's some stuff. Put it in his eyes. We'll try and clear it out." You know, just bathe them, see, and try to get that oil out. Well, I did that, and I helped around there. He was able to sort of take care of himself, so I left them alone. I helped around there, you know.

Marcello: What sort of casualties were coming in?

Grabinski: Well, there was a lot of burned people. You know what I mean, they were black and had oil all over them. So they were laying them on the deck. It was a lot of burned people.

Marcello: I've heard it said that the skin would actually just kind of hang on these people.

Grabinski: Yes. You could see the blisters on them. Well, I was trying to put some petroleum jelly on them and all that and trying to get some gauze. But that wasn't helping them, because it seemed like it was taking their skin off. It seemed like it was better to just leave it open instead of putting something over them, because they wanted to tear it. In other words, they just wanted to tear anything off of them that was . . . you know, like if they had a skivvy shirt, they wanted to tear the goddamned thing off, because they were blistered, you know, burned. So I was around there for quite awhile, I'd say.

That's when they passed the word over the speaker-- ship's communication--that the West Virginia sailors were to muster on Ford Island. So we got off the Tennessee. I left that area; we went toward the island, which was inboard and no damage, and it was easy to get off the ship. So we got on the island.

Marcello: By this time, is the attack over?

Grabinski: Yes. Oh, when we were on them lines, this is where we get a good view of the Oklahoma. That ship is turned over. You see the bottom side up, you know. And looking . . . there's another battleship; it's all oil and black smoke, a lot of black smoke, because of the oil fires, see.

Marcello: In the emotions of the moment, I assume all this doesn't really have time to make an impression on you.

Grabinski: No, none whatsoever. I don't know what the hell's going on, what happened. We know it's the Japs. Now we know, because Rucker, when he come down, he said . . . how he expressed himself, he said, "The goddamned Japs are attacking us!"

So we get off the ship, but there was several of us who wandered around. We're getting hungry about that time. See, I haven't ate, you know. We're hungry. So we wandered in some of the houses. See, they had dependent's housing there. We went in the kitchen; we got something to eat before we went up toward the mess hall. We figured we

wouldn't get anything there. So about ten of us or so, we wondered over to the houses.

Marcello: Are these houses abandoned at this stage?

Grabinski: They're all abandoned; there's nobody in them. So we go in there, and we get some bread; there was some meat, like bologna or something, and a few pieces of fruit and some milk. So we got something to eat.

Then we went over to the building where they were sort of rounding up . . . in other words, they were rounding up everybody to go over to the mess hall. Okay, we get over there; then they start feeding us and everything else, see. We stay there that night.

That night, you know, we're in the place sitting around, laying around, and all that. All of the sudden all hell breaks loose. The antiaircraft start firing. Well, there was some planes in the air, you know. Boy, them tracers! I says, "Uh-oh!" So under the table we dived--the mess tables. These tables are set up. Under the table I go. This sailor was near me; I says, "I guess we'll be pulling rickshaws here pretty soon." I said, "They must be coming in!" We're helpless; there's nothing we can do but just lay under that table and hope we don't get hurt or anything. All the ships that were able . . . you know, everything that was in there opened up on them. Well, then that

settled down.

Marcello: In the meantime, after you had gone over to Ford Island and mustered, had you been doing anything at all during that stretch?

Grabinski: You mean after we mustered over there?

Marcello: Yes.

Grabinski: No. We were just in the building. They were trying to see if anybody was hurt and anything like that. In other words, they were trying to assemble the men, I guess--just assemble them and get them out of the area, because them planes and them hangars and everything was on fire down farther. So this was a safe area, and I think that's why they assembled us in there.

So we stayed there until the next day, and then we got the ferry over. They put us over to the Bloch Center Arena where the "Battle of the Bands" took place. This is where they got those benches, and they said, "Find a place and lay down anywhere you can lay down."

Marcello: In the meantime, what are you talking about while you were over there on Ford Island and now while you're here at the Bloch Center Arena?

Grabinski: Well, we're wondering, "How the hell could they do this?" In other words, the expression is, "Jesus Christ! How we gonna get out of this?" They more than likely are going to



come in, see. "What are we going to do? We're sailors! These ships are all sunk! What are we going to do?" and all that. You know, we're wondering, "What can we do? What are they going to do with us?"

Marcello: In the meantime, what sort of rumors were you hearing?

Grabinski: We're thinking they're landing. They're going to land; they're going to have to, because they hit us, and they got us crippled. We figured, "They're going to be coming in," because, you know, them planes . . . see, we didn't know at that time they were our own, but later on we found out they were our own. But at that time, we figured that was the second attack, and they were coming in. They were going to land, because they had every opportunity to come in there because we were helpless. In other words, if they would have come to me, hell, there was nothing I could do except I would go in the bushes and try to hide away from them. There was no guns for us or anything else like that, and we weren't trained for that.

So we slept there that next day; we were assigned there. I was assigned that second day to ride the ferry for four hours between Ford Island. So I had what you'd call--and a rifle--a bird's-eye view of everything, you know, because I had to ride the channel ferry. All these ships . . . and I mean it's unbelievable, you know. Jesus! "How the hell

are we gonna get out of this," you know what I mean. "This will take forever to fix up," or if we could ever fix it up, you know, these ships. So I rode that for four hours, you know; somebody else relieved me, but the manpower was at the arena. We were sleeping there.

That night sleeping there, I never realized that we had mosquitos in Hawaii. Them goddamned things bit me! I had whelps on me! God almighty! You know, there was mosquitos in there, and we'd been in there numerous times, and there was never any mosquitos. But here we are, trying to sleep there, and they're just eating us up. I recall that very clear. But as far as anything else like that, I figured, "Well, what can I do? What can I do?" You try to volunteer whenever you can.

Okay, this Rucker, you know, he's looking after me. He finds out they're going to have this salvage detail for the West Virginia--all West Virginia men only--because we know the ship and everything. He says, "'Ski,' they're going to assign fifty guys to the salvage detail. I'm getting you on it with me." I said, "Good! Yes, I'll go with you." I wanted to be his protege to begin with, you know; "Yes, Rucker, anything." Okay, they got fifty of us that were originally from the West Virginia. They try to get anyone that was a diver and anyone that was a shipfitter,

you know, people that would be good for a salvage detail. Okay, fifty of us were assigned. This was the third day, see; this is the third day.

Well, that night, I was assigned . . . in other words, I was told to stay at the Bloch Arena and sleep, because that night I was going to relieve and be the security watch on the West Virginia all by myself. So I was to sleep, because I was to remain on her and be the security watch all night. I would get relieved the next day, and I'd be relieved again. So I didn't go over there until the boat went over there to pick up the salvage detail, and then I was deposited there with a bag lunch and a rifle and all by myself. The third night, I am on that ship all by myself.

This time I'm on the starboard side sitting on a bit with a rifle reminiscing again, "What the hell's going to happen?" A few days earlier, I'm saying what a good deal this is. Now how are we going to get out of this? I mean, my career is . . . I'm wondering, "Jesus! What's going to happen now? War and everything else!" I'm in it, which is good, because I'm trained and everything, you know. A lot of guys will have to be drafted and all that; I'm way ahead of them. I'm thinking all that and everything else.

Well, during the quietness of the night, there's banging, banging, banging (gestures). Bang-bang-bang!

Bang-bang-bang! I figure there's trapped men down there. Well, I can't do nothing that night. But as I'm sitting on a bit . . . well, it's already happened before that . . . the crew off the Tennessee come over to the ship and start looting it--lockers--taking everything out of there, looking for valuables, money, anything. I mean, the ship is down . . . sunk.

Marcello: In other words, they had already come aboard the West Virginia before you got there to be security.

Grabinski: Before all of us, yes. That's why they assigned the security. See, they got on the ship looting all over it, you know, breaking the locks and getting the clothes out. They're looking for money or anything of value. They don't want clothes . . . or they might have took clothes, too, but they're looking for valuables. This is why I am assigned that security with a rifle . . . no ammunition in it but a rifle. My instructions are, "If you see anybody coming across, open up the chamber and just close it and click it so they can hear it." You ain't got no ammunition anyway. You're not to shoot them but to frighten them away.

Marcello: How come they didn't give you any ammunition?

Grabinski: Well, so I wouldn't shoot anybody, because I'd have killed the son of a bitch that was crossing over. When I came early before nightfall, I went to check my locker, and

everything was out of it. I could have salvaged my clothes and everything.

Marcello: Somebody had already looted your locker.

Grabinski: Yes. In other words, they'd looted everything on the main deck; all of them lockers were looted. All the clothes, they were pulled out and everything was . . . I had a photo album and everything, you know, and it was all in that oil. To try to find it would be impossible, because they just strew it all over. In other words, they had a reason for not giving us ammunition. If I had a clip, I'd have killed them first two I seen coming over. I honestly would have shot, because that's why they didn't give me no ammunition. I had bitter feelings after I found out what they did.

Marcello: Okay, so you're outside on the deck, and these guys are down inside the West Virginia.

Grabinski: No, they're not in the West Virginia.

Marcello: Oh, they're not?

Grabinski: No, they're trying to come over. In other words, the ships are both . . . our ship is level now. There's an area that they can crawl over. They can crawl over.

Marcello: I see. And this was the noise you were hearing.

Grabinski: No, this wasn't the noise I was hearing. I got them turned around. In other words, after I clicked, I says, "Turn around or I'll blow your heads off." See, they heard that

click, so they turned around and left. See, I'm used to the dark; I can see, you know. But it's pitch-dark. Oh, God! You know, a couple of nights before, everything was bright and lights were all over. I never seen dark as dark as it was there then. There isn't a light anywhere because the fear of attack.

Then I hear that pounding again (gestures). So I sort of . . . I don't dare walk around. I don't have a flashlight; I don't have a light or anything. I got a rifle, but I don't have anything else. I don't even have a flashlight because they don't want me to turn on a light, either. So I'm wondering where it's coming from. It's coming from way forward--the pounding. So I figured it was trapped men down there.

See, we're sunk all the way to the main deck. There is water . . . in other words, we're flooded. That ship is tore up. You can't hardly walk around in there because of the oil and all that debris that these looters have pulled all this stuff out of the lockers and threw all over. I mean, you had to be careful.

In other words, it was best for me to sit at this bit, because this was a point that they could easily come crawling over. That was the only point they could do it. Otherwise, they'd have to sort of hang on something to come

over. This is the point that they could come over.

So they didn't come over anymore that night, but the pounding was going on. That way I didn't even doze off; I didn't even sleep. It seemed like sleep didn't even come to me. Usually, it would be easy because it was dark. I didn't even close my eyes, because I had that fear . . . well, them looters I wasn't going to let aboard, and maybe something would happen again. Maybe the ship would blow up, you know, because they said the ship could blow up. Then, see, I would have easy access of trying to get over to the Tennessee if something . . . maybe the ammunition would blow up. So they wanted me to stay in an area, you know, where I could get back on the Tennessee as rapidly as possible. There was danger of maybe fire, maybe an explosion or something, you know, a reaction, see. Okay, after that, I was on . . . like I say, I was on the salvage detail until the 29th of December on the West Virginia.

Marcello: But you never did figure out what that banging noise was?

Grabinski: Well, I reported that noise in the morning when they come aboard. They said, "Well, it must be somebody trapped below, but there's nothing we can do about it. We'll check on it." Okay, I heard no more about that.

Several more times, I was aboard there, again alone; it was my turn to get it again, see. I heard that same noise;

they were still pounding. I reported it again.

Marcello: How many days later did you hear it the second time?

Grabinski: Well, that was from the . . . you'd say the 7th, the 8th, 9th. It was the 9th that I was aboard there, so there was about three weeks almost in there. I think I had that watch another three times, and each time I had that watch at night, I would hear it. That pounding was still going on. That pounding was . . . well, there was no way they could . . . in other words, if they tried to open up anywhere that flooded . . . it was already flooded anyway, or they thought it was. In other words, they didn't do anything about that pounding that I knew of. The others talked about it, you know.

But in between that period of time, there was one time they gave us a detail . . . they got some red lead paint . . . all of us. They told us to just paint around the superstructure with that red lead paint. We didn't know why at the time until a couple of days later. They even told us to hide. This was when I was on there during the daytime. There was an admiral's barge coming by; somebody was inspecting. It was either the secretary of the Navy or the Roberts Commission. Two times it happened like that where they told us . . . you know, whoever was aboard ship, "Don't let them see you," you know. "Hide and don't be



seen." But I remember two days that we were . . . recalling back how we tried to keep the ships spic-and-span, you know, I'm putting this red lead just anywhere that I . . . you know, just anywhere . . . just slopping it on it.

Marcello: What was the purpose of this? Why did they have you do that?

Grabinski: They didn't tell us why but just to do it. The purpose was not explained. We're saying, "What the hell's wrong with these people?" Well, it was like a cover-up, you know, that the ships were being repaired maybe or something, you know what I mean. Because we were taking the range-finders and a lot of other stuff out of there, too.

Then like I said, on the 29th, I was reassigned, you know, I was on the muster role for the West Virginia until December 29th, and I was assigned to the submarine base. So I was assigned there, and there was some of our shipfitters already assigned there, Being shipfitters, they needed people over there. They were trying to put people where they could do the most good, and that was submarine repair work.

Okay, later on when I was still there, they start calling back the crew of the West Virginia, because they were going to raise her, you know, and start fixing her up, get her in dry dock, and try to get her to the States. Well,

whenever I could, I would go over to the West Virginia and try to get a reassignment. The lieutenant that was in charge says, "Yeah, we're calling you all back. You'll be able to get back real easy." So, boy, I go back to the sub base. I'm waiting, waiting; several weeks go by. I don't see no transfers. So I go back and see this lieutenant, and he says, "There's no way we can get you. You're frozen over there."

So I request the captain of the submarine base to get transferred over to the West Virginia. I want to get back to my ship, you know, I've still got that proudness about me; I want to get back on my ship. I want to get if fixed, and I want to get back in the fight. If they're going to salvage it, that's my ship; I want to go back. Well, I go up there, and he turns me down. He says, "You are assigned here. You're essentially needed here more than you are on the West Virginia. We need you."

That is about the time I also got in on the radar installations on the submarines. They had very little radar on them. I got in on that on the ground floor, you know, at the very beginning. At the beginning, occasionally one of the submarines that had it would come in. I think there was two occasions where we took it off the submarine that come in off of patrol and put it on others that were

going to go out, see. So I was froze. I tried numerous times to get back.

Six months or so . . . about six months later, the West Virginia was pumped out, raised, put in dry dock.

Well, I went over to see the damage that was done.

(Whistle) I mean, you could have drove big trucks in there and everything in the center. Most of the damage was done in the center, in the engineering spaces and all that. That port side had holes through the decks--the destruction was unbelievable--from the torpedoes and bombs. But most of it was in the center on the port side.

Marcello: And actually, when you were aboard while all the damage was being inflicted, you really didn't feel too much of what was taking place.

Grabinski: No, I was inside the ship. In other words, I had no way to see what was going on.

Marcello: Well, that's an indication of how large one of those battle-ships really is, because those torpedoes make a hole big enough that you can drive a truck through it.

Grabinski: Even bigger. We didn't feel it as far aft as we were. I think they said we had four torpedo hits. I think the reason why it seemed like . . . see, there was some land close to us, and these planes had to come . . . the way we were sitting there, they almost had to come in there, and

they would almost drop them in the same area. So this is where all the destruction was after I seen it in dry dock.

Okay, about a year later after that, after they got her fixed . . . in other words, they got here to where she could go back to the States on her own power. They took her cage mast off and put it over and made a signal tower, you know. You know, in other words, there's a reminder of her, there, see, at that time. Well, this is a year later after she's been in dry dock.

Again, during that time, I'm trying to get back on my ship. There's nothing I can do; they won't let me go back on it, you know. "No way! You're frozen."

So on the day she left, I mean, tears came in my eyes. I bawled. It was like losing part of me. My ship was leaving; here I am, I'm still stuck here. What the hell am I doing? I'm not fighting or anything, you know. In other words, I don't want this. I'm fighting it every way I can. Here I'm saying, "What the hell good am I doing?" And they keep telling me, "You're in your slot. You're in there where we need you, and this is where you're going to remain." Okay, this is what happened to me.

I stayed at the submarine base. In other words, I make petty officer second; I make petty officer first. I took

all of the exams; they were still giving us exams. I made chief petty officer. I was only twenty-three years old when I made chief petty officer, but I felt like I got to be an older person . . . more matured. In other words, I felt old, because I matured so quickly. I didn't even have the hash mark, which means four years in the Navy. I only had three years and three months. In other words, my plan of progressing as fast as I could still worked for me.

Marcello: You were progressing at this stage faster than what you had ever imagined during peacetime.

Grabinski: Right. In other words, they even waived time when I was petty officer first class because of the work I was doing. They gave me a recommendation and told me I didn't need the required time between first class and chief. You had to have so much time, you know. At the same time, they were thinking of making a warrant officer out of me. Well, I had the choice of going either way, see. This was February, 1944. I'm still at the submarine base, you know, fighting the war there.

I went to an old chief. Like I told you, I respected the chief very highly. Here I am, a boot, really a boot, twenty-three years old, and here I am--already chief. This guy has quite a bit of time in. I said, "Chief what would

you do? Would you take the warrant officer's rank, or would you go up for chief?" He told me to go up for chief. He says, "You're young; you haven't got that experience. You need that experience of being a chief. If you take that jump, you're going to miss a lot." He told me, "You're going to miss a helluva lot, because there's where it is--right there--of being an enlisted man. Be a chief." So I turned down the warrant officer promotion, took the chief's exam, made it, and continued to stay there.

But June of 1944, they let me go home on leave. That was the first leave I'd had since we came to Hawaii in February of 1944. That was the first time I was able to go home. Then I had to come back to the sub base. I stayed there until July of 1946. The war and everything was over. In other words, I was frozen; I was there the whole war. When I tell this to anybody, they can't believe it, because it's unbelievable that I never left it. I tried numerous times during that time I was there to get other ships, because I felt like I wasn't doing anything. But I stayed there.

I made a career out of the Navy. I retired in 1959, having served twenty years in the Navy like I set my goals for. I got out and I was only thirty-nine years old. I

retired in Long Beach, California.

I didn't want to be around the Navy anymore. I wanted to get in civilian life, so I went to work as a shipfitter at Todd Shipyard in San Pedro, where I'd been in there for repairs and everything on different ships. I went to work there, and I worked there almost two years until my wife said it would be better if I worked for the civil service and worked for the Navy.

So one time they were having . . . we were launching one of the cargo ships at Todd Shipyard, and I put my application in, and they hired me that afternoon. So that's how I worked at the Naval shipyard from 1961 until I retired from there in 1972. I was only fifty-one when I retired at that time. So in 1972, I retired from the shipyard. I was able to retire early, which gave me over thirty years federal service.

From there I went to work for Litton Systems in Pascagoula, Mississippi. Well, I found out that wasn't for me. I spent a year down there working on building ships. I was a supervisor on building ships . . . Navy ships again--destroyers and the carriers--and there were some freighters we were building, too. But after a year, I found out that was one of the worst shore duties I had in civilian life or in the Navy. In other words, that was

worse than I ever experienced.

So I come back to Long Beach. I sort of took it easy for awhile. I went back to work for Todd Shipyard again. They were building tankers, civilian tankers. I worked there about nine months; I decided I'd had enough. I felt that I was earning enough money and all that that I completely retired in 1974, and I've been retired ever since, and I'm enjoying life completely. I think that's about my story.

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

Grabinski: Well, I hope so. Thank you very much.