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Interview with
JAMES F. ANDERSON
May 15, 1982

Place of Interview: Austin, Texas

Interviewer: R. E. Marcello

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Oral History Collection

James F. Anderson

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Austin, Texas

Date: May 15, 1982

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing James Anderson for the North Texas University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 15, 1982, in Austin, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Anderson in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the hospital ship USS Solace during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Anderson, 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. Anderson: I was born on July 23, 1923, in Fort Worth, Texas. I moved from there to Houston, stayed there about fourteen years, and moved to Austin, Texas. I stayed there about three-and-a-half years and joined the Navy in March of 1941.

Marcello: So you were approximately eighteen years old, then, when you joined the Navy.

Anderson: No, I was still seventeen.

Marcello: Seventeen,

Anderson: Why did you decide to join the Navy at that time?

Anderson: Oh, I had been in trouble around Austin, and I was kind of ashamed of myself, and I wanted to prove I could do better than I had done, and so I joined the Navy,

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

Anderson: Well, I had always heard that it was cleaner, three good meals a day, regular pay, and an honest chance for promotion, where no one could break you by simply going before an officer and break you back to nothing,

Marcello: How difficult, or easy, was it to get into the Navy at the time that you joined?

Anderson: It seemed to be quite difficult, The requirements were pretty high,

Marcello: Was there any waiting period after you made your initial attempt to join, before you actually got in?

Anderson: I had a problem with my kidneys, and it seems that they couldn't take me as I was. The recruiter recommended that I take some medicine to clear up this infection in my kidneys. About two days later, I went back, and they ran these tests on my urine again. This was clear, so I was accepted--in Austin, but I couldn't be sworn in here, I went with several others from Austin down to Houston, where we were sworn in officially. I went from there out

to San Diego for training,

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

Anderson: I believe it was six weeks, maybe eight weeks,

Marcello: That's kind of interesting, I think, because they had evidently cut it back at that time. At one time, you know, I think boot camp was about three months. That's what it was under ordinary conditions,

Anderson: I remember I was in Company 68, which would have meant there'd have had to be a lot of companies ahead of me if I arrived there in March,,the last part of March. So this must have been going on for possibly all of 1941.

Marcello: How closely were you keeping abreast of current events and world affairs at that particular time--as a seventeen-year-old?

Anderson: I wasn't keeping any record of anything, and I was too occupied with basic training.

Marcello: When you thought of the country getting into war, were your eyes turned more toward Europe or the Far East?

Anderson: Toward Japan, mostly because my parents, my mother in particular, had said for years, when we lived in Houston and saw these ships from Japan hauling tons and tons of scrap metal off, that some day they'd send them back to us in bullets.

Marcello: Is there anything eventful that happened in boot camp that you think we should get as part of the record, or what was the normal Navy boot camp?

Anderson: It was pretty much normal, as far as I can remember now. I do

remember seeing the Lexington coming in and tying up at the island, and also I saw the Saratoga come in and tie up. Both of them were in and out while I was going through boot camp. This was the only thing...quite remarkable...those ships were so large.

Marcello: Where did you go from boot camp?

Anderson: I went to the naval hospital at Balboa for hospital corps training.

Marcello: Evidently, then, you were one of the fortunate ones to be able to go to a Navy school after you got out of boot camp, is that correct?

Anderson: No, I wouldn't say I was fortunate because most all the members of my company did go to school. I wanted to get into radio school, but my qualifications weren't quite good enough, and if you didn't make that, the chances were good that you'd go to hospital corps school.

Marcello: How long did the hospital corps school last there at Balboa?

Anderson: Let's see...I believe about two months.

Marcello: What were some of the courses of study that you had there? What were some of the things that you prepared for?

Anderson: Oh, we covered almost everything that a modern registered nurse would get. We had anatomy, physiology, materia medica, poisons and antidotes, and basic hospital nursing. We covered the complete gamut, except for anesthesia, I believe...emergency medical treatment. But basically, the main thing was on-the-ward-training

and being able to recognize various things that were wrong and understanding absolute and total cleanliness in the care of the patients.

Marcello: Awhile ago, you mentioned that you would have rather have gone to radio school. By the time you got out of the hospital corps school, had you changed your mind any? Was it a job that you thought you were going to like?

Anderson: Well, I knew I would like that type of work, but I had no idea what a hazard being a hospital corpsman would be in time of war.

Marcello: After you left hospital corps school, where did you go?

Anderson: I was assigned to the naval hospital at Pearl Harbor and left out of San Diego on the oil tanker Kaskaskia. The first night out, we ran into a terrible storm, and in the compartment amidships, where they had those who were being transferred out to places in the Pacific, someone had left the hatch open, and when we got in the storm, that entire compartment was awash with about six inches of water. I was quite fortunate. Most of the men had left their shoes and socks down on the deck. I didn't have a pillow available, so I used my shoes as a pillow. I was one of the few that had something to put on their feet the next morning that was dry. Most of them couldn't even find their shoes (chuckle).

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of going to Pearl Harbor?

Anderson: I really didn't give it much thought, except this was something new, and that was great.

Marcello: Maybe I should rephrase my question. What did you think about the

idea of being stationed in the Hawaiian Islands?

Anderson: I really didn't give it much thought; it was just the idea of seeing someplace new.

Marcello: Okay, when you got to Pearl Harbor and were assigned to the naval hospital there, what sort of function did you have at that naval hospital?

Anderson: I worked on the fracture ward, where we had many old veterans from World War I. A lot of them had osteomyelitis of the bone and were unable to get around very well. That was the main thing. We had, I guess, about sixty patients on that ward.

Marcello: How long did you remain there at the naval hospital?

Anderson: Until about Navy Day of 1941, and at that time I was transferred with several others to the hospital ship Solace, which was tied up in the harbor, just off of Ford Island.

Marcello: You will have to pardon my ignorance, but when was Navy Day?

Anderson: Oh, golly...November...I couldn't tell you exactly what the date is. We no longer recognize, or at least observe or celebrate, that date.

Marcello: So it was in November of 1941, however, when you went aboard the Solace.

Anderson: Yes,

Marcello: What were your thoughts or your feelings about being transferred from the hospital, which as a shore assignment, over to the Solace?

Anderson: Well, it was always a chance for more travel and seeing more things,

and although we had done a lot of running around and practicing for the possibility of war at the hospital and went through various drills continuously for receiving patients, it was nice to get away from there. I was about as low on the totem pole as a person could be, so myself and several others that were newly arrived from hospital corps school got all the dirty, drudgery work. I was glad to get away from there, really.

Marcello: You've mentioned several points that I need to follow up. When you got out of the hospital corps school, what was your rank or rating?

Anderson: I believe I was a hospital apprentice first class.

Marcello: And did you still have that rank at the time you were transferred from the naval hospital at Pearl to the Solace?

Anderson: Yes, I did,

Marcello: How fast or slow was promotion in that rating during those pre-Pearl Harbor days?

Anderson: Advancement was extremely slow, although up to pharmacist's mate second class, it was pretty much wide-open. But the examinations were extremely stiff. A hospital corpsman could not just take an examination and, regardless of whether he'd passed or not, be promoted because somebody liked you. You had to pass the examination, and it was very stiff. Our hospital corps handbook was over three hundred pages, and it had to be almost memorized from cover to cover to be able to pass an examination.

Marcello: Is it also not true that there had to be an opening before you could

be promoted?

Anderson: No, this wasn't true for rates below second class. In other words, from a hospital apprentice through third class pharmacist's mate, it was pretty much wide open.

Marcello: But once you get up into the petty officer ranks, then there had to be openings, isn't that correct?

Anderson: Absolutely. We had a definite number of chiefs, a definite number of warrants, and a limited number of first class and second class. Unless one of them was transferred or got in trouble and was busted, no one could move up.

Marcello: When you moved over to the Solace, what was your function there?

Anderson: I was assigned to the surgical ward as just one of the corpsmen working in the ward. I liked the work a great deal. We had all kinds of patients coming in and out--a lot of appendicitis cases--and it was a good place to be.

Marcello: Awhile ago, you were mentioning the drills and so on that you and your fellow corpsmen would participate in in preparation for wartime conditions. Describe how some of those drills worked. What was involved in those drills? Let's go back to the Pearl Harbor naval hospital, and then we'll work our way up to the Solace again.

Anderson: All right. The drill that I can remember most was an old cart with about a hundred feet or two hundred feet of water hose on it. Several of us would grab hold of the tongue of this thing and take off running from a fire hydrant to wherever our destination

happened to be that day. Everything that we had to work with should have been called an antique because there was no telling how many years old it was. It would have been beautiful in a museum,

Marcello: So, basically, when you were there at the hospital, your function under wartime conditions was not primarily that of a corpsman, but was rather that of a damage controlman in a sense?

Anderson: Well, of course, considering that nothing happened to the hospital, my job would have been in that ward,

Marcello: Now when you move aboard the Solace, was your battle position there in the surgical ward? In other words, when General Quarters sounded, is that where you needed to be?

Anderson: Yes, this is right,

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate, what changes, if any, could you detect in your training routine?

Anderson: We had drills of different kinds, where we had simulated bombing runs, torpedo runs, as far as I can remember now, by our own planes over the harbor. We called them "sham battles" at that time. We'd have General Quarters, and we had many of these. Then, after awhile, many of us, I believe, became rather complacent about the thing because there were so many drills,

Marcello: When General Quarters commenced, were the corpsmen, in essence, preparing for any specific types of casualties or cases?

Anderson: No, not really, because we should have been or were able to take

anything that came at us. We had the most modern hospital anywhere in the Pacific Ocean west of California. There was nothing that was ahead of us or better than we were, regardless of where you looked. Ours was by far the best, with the very finest doctors the government could get to put on that ship,

Marcello: How large was the Solace in terms of its capacity to handle patients and so on?

Anderson: I would say, roughly, very close to five hundred beds.

Marcello: And, like you mentioned, it could handle all kinds of casualties.

Anderson: Yes, we could handle everything.

Marcello: One of the common casualties that occurred during the attack-- and I'm sure you're aware of this--was the so-called "flash burn." Was the Solace pretty well-equipped to handle all sorts of burn cases and burn patients and so on?

Anderson: We didn't have any really good method of handling burns at all. The only thing that was known, really, at that time for burns was tannic acid. We made gallons and gallons of tannic acid in our galley and brought it to the burn wards, but actually all of our wards were crowded with burn victims, compounded with fractures and other things that had happened to these people. We put gauze over the burns and then poured the tannic acid on. Every piece of linen on that ship, I believe, in a week's time was ruined with tannic acid. But this was a minor thing.

But the tannic acid didn't do all we wanted it to do, and we didn't have any of the modern facilities that we have today. I

believe that the sulfa drugs were only just then becoming available, and no one really knew how much good or harm they could do,

Marcello: We'll come back and pick up this point a little bit later, I'm sure. During your short tenure on the Solace prior to the attack, did it ever leave Pearl Harbor?

Anderson: No, we never left there. We stayed anchored in the same place until the war started.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about your liberty routine. When you went ashore,,well, first of all, how did the liberty routine work for you?

Anderson: I believe we were on a four-section watch, which meant we had about three days off out of four. Most of my time was spent right there in the Pearl Harbor area. I only made about...I guess there's a correction to be made there in my rating. I must have been a hospital apprentice second class when I arrived out there and had not yet reached first class, so I was only making \$36 a month, which didn't allow me to travel very far. And it was only a rare occasion when I got into Honolulu, and at that time I never got down to Waikiki Beach but once.

Marcello: What did you normally do when you went into Honolulu?

Anderson: Oh, you can talk about Hotel Street, and I was there standing in the lines with the rest of these crazy sailors (chuckle). That was about it. I spent a lot of time around the YMCA, which was a very beautiful place, and those that were there to take care

of the servicemen really were wonderful people, I spent quite a bit of time at the old Episcopal church there, where I went to church services as often as I could get there on Sunday.

Marcello: A moment ago, you mentioned that you stood in line on Hotel Street with the rest of the sailors, I'm assuming that, as a corpsman, you had no qualms about partaking of the pleasures on Hotel Street?

Anderson: I believe all of the women there were cleaner by far than anything you could find walking the streets. The girls in the hotels were very well checked out, and there was no real records that ever came in of them ever passing on any types of venereal diseases to the men of the armed forces,

Marcello: How did the liberty routine work aboard the Solace? I think you mentioned awhile ago that you might have one night out of every four?

Anderson: Yes, that's correct. Then it would work around to where I'd have a Saturday and be off Sunday, and then the following week I might have a Saturday and a Sunday together. Then the following weekend, I'd be off Saturday and Sunday, and then maybe I'd catch a Sunday. It rotated around. I couldn't tell you now exactly how that worked.

Marcello: In general, were you rather satisfied with the liberty routine as it developed for you?

Anderson: Well, I had plenty of time off of the ship if I wanted it. Again, it goes back to the business of \$36 a month don't go very far. So when I was off, I did a great deal of walking. I walked from one end of the Pearl Harbor compound around to the other, and I saw everything that there was to see there.

Marcello: What was the food like aboard the Solace?

Anderson: We had excellent food all the time. All of our patients were very well-fed. We had hot carts that could be plugged in and kept hot while we were serving out the meals. The cart started out hot, and we had elevators to move them the galley and our special diet kitchen up to the wards.

Marcello: What were your personal living quarters like aboard the Solace?

Anderson: I'd say they were pretty well-cramped. I believe we were three bunks high on a stanchion and three bunks high on the opposite side of the stanchion, which meant that there was six of us living side-by-side, one on top of the other, and then another six possibly on each end of that. So in this compartment, there were about 150 corpsmen. This was only half of that compartment, which was in a forward part of the ship. The other half was about 150 men of the various ratings of the rest of the ship--quartermasters, seamen, boatswain's mates, engineering, and so forth.

Marcello: As you look back on that period before the attack, how would

describe the morale of you and your shipmates aboard the Solace?

Anderson: I believe we were all really happy with what was going on. Possibly, the only thing that anyone might have been unhappy about was the fact that they'd like to move out of there and go somewhere else--get around and see something else--because we had been in there quite some time, acting as a base hospital.

At the time I went to the hospital at Pearl Harbor, there was a group there that was building a hospital up on Red Hill. This was, I believe, a prefabricated unit that supposedly would have taken another six to nine months to put together. Now this was at the time of December 7 when they still had that much work to do on it, and in about forty-eight hours, this six- to nine-man job was completed. They were able to take patients and casualties and bodies from my ship and other ships in the harbor almost immediately, while they were still putting the hospital together.

Marcello: Okay, I think this more or less brings us up to those days immediately prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, so let's go into that period in a great deal of detail. For example, let's start with Saturday, December 6, 1941. Describe for me as best you can what your routine was on Saturday.

Anderson: I believe it was just another normal working day. It was a personnel inspection and an inspection of the ship's spaces,

possibly with no liberty for anyone on the ship at all that day until after twelve o'clock noon. All the inspections were to be held that morning. There was no different routine that day than any other day--that I could see.

I'd like to go back just a little bit. A few days before this happened, one of the Army Air Force's planes was flying over Pearl Harbor, and he came down on a diving attack into the middle of the harbor and was unable to pull out and went right straight into the water. In a few moments, we had--not from my ship, but from other ships--at least two motor whaleboats there, motor launches, on the scene and was able to pick the pilot up. This seemed to be quite a remarkable thing, that anybody would be dive-bombing...I believe it was a P-38 or P-36 that came in.

Marcello: And the pilot didn't bail out or anything? He hit the water, and they were able to save him?

Anderson: I believe he bailed out just a few moments before it hit the water, but I believe he was alive and survived.

Marcello: Okay, what did you do that Saturday evening of December 6?

Anderson: I was on duty, working in the ward--normal routine. We had possibly, oh, ten or fifteen cases from surgery, like, appendicitis and things of this sort. Mostly appendicitis is what we got.

Marcello: Did anything else eventful happen that evening aboard the Solace?

Anderson: Not that I can remember. I do remember that we had an old chief on there that came on from the Raleigh, an old four-stack cruiser. As soon as he got on our ward, which was about December 3, he wanted to know where the coffee was. We didn't have any on the ward, so he came up with the money to buy, ..what he said he wanted was a Silex coffeemaker. He said, "The first one of you to go ashore, get it and bring it back with and the coffee." He said, "Don't worry about the cost," and he gave one of us some money. So we had plenty of coffee from that day on up until the time the war started. At that time, he was able to talk someone into releasing him to go back to his cruiser, and he told us, "Keep the coffee pot going." (chuckle)

Marcello: On a Saturday night, would there be very many drunks coming back aboard the Solace after having been in Honolulu or something like that?

Anderson: I'm sure there were quite a few who came back, but it was a good idea to keep your mouth shut, or you'd be in a great deal of trouble.

Marcello: What were your plans for the next day?

Anderson: My plans for Sunday morning were to go to the church, the Episcopal church, right in downtown Honolulu. I possibly planned on going to someone's home for dinner because many

of the servicemen were invited out each Sunday to a home in the Honolulu area for lunch or dinner,

Marcello: So what time did you get up that Sunday morning?

Anderson: I believe it was six o'clock.

Marcello: Why don't you give me your routine for that Sunday morning from the time you got up until all hell broke loose?

Anderson: Well, it was normal routine. I believe reveille was about six o'clock, I got up, showered and dressed, cleaned up and made sure my uniform was in proper shape to go ashore... shoes and so forth, I had breakfast, and then I just waited around and talked with various other men that were getting ready to go on liberty. This took us up to about seven-thirty, and then we fell in a line--I guess it was on a starboard side of the ship--waiting to go off the ship into the liberty boats to go over to the fleet landing. From there we'd catch buses or taxis into Honolulu.

I was standing next to a large double-steel door hatch with several other men. We were looking out across the end of Ford Island, and next to us was the Dobbin, repair ship Dobbin, with about five destroyers alongside. Other ships straight across in that direction, I couldn't see. But across the corner of the island was the old battleship Utah. It had lumber on its deck, because they used it for bombing, artificial bombing.

So while I was standing there, in come the airplanes over the rim of this volcanic crater that's Pearl Harbor. They swoop down, and I hollered to the guy next to me, "Look, we've got another sham battle this morning! We won't get ashore for quite a while!" Well, the "sham battle" turned out to be more than that. They dropped torpedoes, and I said, "Look! They're dropping torpedoes!" He said, "What do you suppose is going on?" And with that, they swooped up almost immediately over the Utah.

Before the bombs had even gone off, I hollered, "They've got red balls on the wings! Those are Jap planes! Let's get these hatches closed!" The hatch normally had to be closed with a wrench. Two of us reached out and grabbed those heavy steel doors and slammed them shut and dogged it down in a few seconds time, which normally took about ten minutes with about three or four men working to do the job.

Marcello: So the adrenelin was really pumping?

Anderson: It was there. I was really, really high on my adrenelin.

Marcello: At this point, General Quarters had not sounded or anything?

Anderson: No, it had not. I went from there immediately to the quarter-deck, which was approximately, oh, ten or fifteen feet down this hallway. Our officer-of-the-day was standing there--I believe he was an ensign--and he was kind of panic-stricken and didn't know what to do,

Off to the other side of the ship where the C.P.O. quarters

was, here comes the chief out, barefooted, with his black trousers on and pulling his suspenders up over his shoulders, I believe his name was Cunningham, He had spent many years on destroyers, He came out and immediately took command of our quarter-deck, He sounded General Quarters, called the engine room, and told them to get up a head of steam, sent the deck crew to their assigned getting-underway stations, and sent the officer-of-the-day to the bridge. I do not believe our captain or executive officer--either--were aboard, so Chief Cunningham took over the business of getting us out of there.

Marcello: And what did you personally do at that point?

Anderson: At this point, I went back,,well, he sounded General Quarters first, and then he notified these people to make preparations for getting underway. And with General Quarters, that meant get back to your ward and stand by for assignment, So as soon as I got there, our senior corpsman had all of us get metal shields that were there to cover the windows in our ward, We had oblong-shaped windows; I believe they slid up and down about like a house window. Well, these metal plates fitted over these, On the outside there were screws there that were coated with paint, to the best of my memory now, and I believe we had wing-nuts to put them on with. So we had quite a battle out there getting these cover plates on.

At this time, I was on the opposite side of the ship

from where I had been when the fracas started. I looked out for a moment in the direction of our battleships, where there was a tremendous noise. At that point, I saw a Japanese plane, a bomber, come in very low, right over the top of the Arizona. I saw it drop a bomb that went down--what looked like--the stack of the Arizona, and almost instantaneously the entire ship blew up.

Marcello: Can you describe that scene in any more detail?

Anderson: When it blew up, there was a tremendous flash of fire and thunderous noise. I saw, flying through the air and screaming, one of the men off the Arizona as he was blown through the air.

Marcello: Approximately how far were you from the Arizona? You would have to estimate this, of course.

Anderson: About two hundred to three hundred yards.

Marcello: Some people say that it looked as though the Arizona were actually lifted out of the water a little bit and settled back down. Did you notice that?

Anderson: It may have. But I do remember the Utah, if we can go back to this. When the Utah was torpedoed, it jumped--what looked like--ten feet straight out of the water, with possibly three torpedoes that hit it. Then it came down, and it settled fairly rapid on--I don't know--either the port or starboard side, and when it did--going over rapidly--this lumber that was on the deck went flying through the air. The men that

were trying to get off of the Utah were struck by the flying lumber and knocked down. And then, for some reason, the entire ballast shifted to the opposite side, and it flip-flopped from one side to the other and went down. Here's all the lumber flying across the deck again, and these men are tangled up in it and trying to jump over the side to swim ashore to Ford Island,

Marcello: What were your immediate thoughts, if you can remember, when you saw what was happening to the Utah and the Arizona? Now you're only seventeen or eighteen years old at this point, isn't that correct?

Anderson: I was eighteen. But I made a written note of everything I have described up to this point, and then possibly a month later, I saw this note again in my locker, and I put a "P.S." on the bottom that said, "This must be the end."

Marcello: When did you make that written note?

Anderson: Immediately after the initial attack, when I went to the ward for my General Quarters station, I grabbed a piece of paper and a pencil and wrote this down.

Marcello: Whatever possessed you to do that? Do you know why you did it?

Anderson: I wanted to try to remember the initial shock of everything that happened because I did not believe that years later I could remember it at all.

Marcello: But I think it's kind of interesting that you would have had

the foresight or that that kind of an idea would have popped into your head, given the circumstances of the moment.

Anderson: I tried to find that to bring in to show you this morning, but I was unable to locate it.

Marcello: Approximately how long were you viewing the scene with regard to the Arizona?

Anderson: Approximately thirty, forty-five seconds. I had so much to do there--I had just turned around momentarily--hanging up these cover plates over these windows when I saw this happen. The entire ship was engulfed in black smoke and flames from the oil in the water, and then there was the massive explosions in the bow of the ship where, I have been told since, there was a magazine that blew up. But the thunder...the impact of these explosions was almost too much to stand up, even at this distance that I was from the Arizona.

Marcello: Did the repercussions from that explosion affect the Solace? In other words, did it shake or anything like that?

Anderson: I am sure, sitting broadside to these explosions, that we must have rocked some, but there were so many explosions from every direction that it would be impossible to say, and I was too occupied with doing what I was out there doing--to get those cover plates out there, regardless.

Marcello: Approximately how long did it take you to get those cover plates up?

Anderson: We were there, oh, fifteen, maybe thirty, minutes. I couldn't

say for sure. Then I went back into the ward, where three or four of us were reassigned to immediately go out on the 02 deck, on the starboard side again, next to the Dobbin, with barrels of plaster-of-paris and big rolls of crinoline and cut it into different sizes for making plaster-of-paris so that when these people came in with fractures, we'd have what we needed immediately to take care of them.

While I was standing there, the Japanese were flying by us so close and so low that our ships in the harbor were unable to shoot at the Japanese planes that were coming in to attack Ford Island, or they would have hit us. While I was standing there with these three men, we'd hear one coming by, and we looked up. This one time I was standing up and looking right straight out toward the Dobbin, when this one plane went by. I could see straight into the cockpit of this aircraft, and I could see the Japanese pilot. I told one of the men, "If I had a bed pan now, I could hit that son-of-a-bitch!" (chuckle)

Marcello: Describe what the Japanese pilot looked like, as best you can recall his physical appearance.

Anderson: I couldn't describe it at all. There was just a dark face with a helmet that went by at a very high speed.

Marcello: And they were coming in very, very low?

Anderson: Yes, for protection. They knew we wouldn't shoot at our own ships in trying to shoot them down.

Marcello: Was the Solace a target, or not?

Anderson: No, we were not a target. We were more a protection, I suppose, than anything. Also, some Japanese aircraft flying in the area dropped a torpedo. I don't know who it was intended for. Supposedly, it bounced off of our buoy that we were tied to on the bow and went over and hit the mud on the edge of Ford Island and blew up there. Fortunately, it missed everything around there. We had all these destroyers tied to the Dobbin.

Another thing that happened while we were rolling the plaster-of-paris,,.the Dobbin had twin 40-millimeter mounts up on her bow. I remember the crew manning that ship and getting ammunition into the guns, and it fired very slow-- Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! This went on for several minutes, and every now and then, I'd glance over while we were making the plaster-of-paris rolls, and then I saw an officer go running out there, and they stopped firing for maybe a minute or two. He jumped back away from the gun, and it took off like a highly accelerated racer. It could really throw the shells out then.

Marcello: Why were you making those plaster-of-paris rolls outside rather than somewhere down in one of the wards?

Anderson: I really couldn't tell you. I didn't question what they told me to do, and the rest of us,,we just did what we were told to do, and hopefully it was the right thing.

Marcello: I'm also interested in the fact that you mentioned that you were preparing for fractures. Again, I go back to something that I mentioned earlier. Fractures seemed to be the number-one priority, rather than burns or anything of that nature at this point.

Anderson: At this point, we didn't know exactly what we would get, so we were trying to prepare for everything. But we just had no idea that our ship would be flooded with so many burn victims.

Marcello: So what, basically, are you doing? You're making these plaster-of-paris rolls, and at the same time, you're glancing up occasionally at the action that was taking place?

Anderson: Yes, sir, that's correct.

Marcello: Okay, when do the first casualties start coming aboard?

Anderson: Oh, approximately in fifteen minutes.

Marcello: Okay, describe what your role is at that point. What are you doing?

Anderson: Standing by on a ward, making sure that all of the beds are ready and that all the medications or medicines and surgical equipment that we might need is ready, and not knowing really what might be coming in. But I was in the ward, and ready.

Marcello: Okay, describe the casualties that are coming in now.

Anderson: They came in, and they were horribly burned. Most all of them had been in the water and were soaked with oil, and they were pitiful. Their fingers were melted like candlesticks; their

ears were burned off or melted down; and their noses were burned off and melted down. There was no hair on a lot of their heads; a lot of them had their clothing completely blown away by bomb concussions and explosions from inside the ship. It was unbelievable, the horrible shape of the men that we got in. And we had many that died within a little while from the heat that they had inhaled into their lungs and the tremendous shock of the burns. We gave them a lot of morphine, I remember. Of course, we kept a record of how often they got it, so we didn't give them too much. But all were in unbelievable pain.

Marcello: Were you overwhelmed initially when all these burn victims came in?

Anderson: I was mentally overwhelmed, yes, to see people in such god-awful agony that just a very short time before were preparing for another Sunday, like I was, to somehow or other get off the ship and go ashore for a few hours. This was a terrible turn-around, and it happened in such a hurry. I believe everyone was in a state of shock, while trying to do the very best that they could, as they had been trained to do.

Marcello: How would you describe the conduct of the personnel in the surgical ward? Was everything being done in a professional manner, or was there chaos and confusion?

Anderson: There was no chaos, no confusion. We all knew what we were supposed to do, and we did it, and a lot extra, also.

We had to get this tannic acid from the galley, start bringing it in. Really, I didn't see any fractures. I saw quite a few shrapnel cases, where men were wounded, but this went into a category that was so minor, compared to the burns of these men that came in, that taking care of the burn cases first and alleviating their pain was most important-- to try to get them out of this state of shock, and to try to get fluids going into their arms, intravenous fluids. With most of these men, their legs and arms were so badly burned that it was almost impossible to find a vein anywhere in their body where we could put intravenous fluid.

Marcello: And how long did you continue to work in the surgical ward caring for these burn victims?

Anderson: I believe it was forty-eight hours or more, straight, before I got any sleep.

Marcello: In other words, after had been out on the deck rolling those plaster-of-paris bandages and so on, you then went back to your station, and at that point you were not able to see what was going on outside.

Anderson: That's correct. I did not see anything else out there until late that night. I went out,..they turned me loose for a few minutes. We were in a state of total blackout, and they let me out for a few minutes, to get off of the ward, get some fresh air. While I was there was when our American planes came in that we shot down, and I could see around the

harbor, up high in the mountains, all these guns that were firing at our own planes, and the traces flying in all directions, Realizing the danger of being on deck, I got back inside in a hurry.

Marcello: When you saw those planes coming in that evening, what were your first thoughts?

Anderson: I did not see any of the planes coming in. This was related to me by others in the Army Air Corps. They told me what had happened later and what had caused all of the gunfire.

Marcello: But you did see the gunfire?

Anderson: Oh, yes, very definitely. It looked like a beautiful Christmas tree,

Marcello: Were your first thoughts that the Japanese were coming back?

Anderson: Yes, very definitely.

Marcello: Okay, let's get back down to the scene in the surgical ward again. Earlier in our interview, you mentioned that you had to prepare all this tannic acid for these burn victims. Then, also at one point, you mentioned that you were using sheets for bandages, so obviously you did run out of the regular surgical bandages and so on.

Anderson: If I gave you this impression about the sheets for bandages, I didn't intend to. The sheets, of course, became totally soaked, under the patients, from the tannic acid. We practically drowned these poor burned-up men with tannic acid. But we

would lay gauze over the skin, and it would had a tendency to hold the tannic acid on the burn rather than run off immediately. It's like trying to put butter, say, on a hot dog, that as soon as it gets on the hot dog, it's so hot that the butter runs off. Well, the skin on these men that were burned just would not hold any tannic acid--it ran off--so with the gauze on there, it acted like a sponge to hold the fluid on the skin. And, of course, all of the sheets and pillow cases immediately became stained with this tannic acid,

Marcello: I think that's what you did mention awhile ago, and I misinterpreted what you said. Were there any unusual cases that you recollect? When I say "unusual cases," I mean, perhaps, those other than the burn victims, of which there were many.

Anderson: Yes, there is one in particular--the only man that I can remember that we got on as a casualty. He came on from one of the battleships. Wherever he was standing at the particular time that the war started, he was involved in a tremendous explosion. It had blown every stitch of clothes off of this man except his web belt, and on the belt was his chief master-at-arms badge. This was the only thing that this man had on his body when he came aboard our ship. He had slight burns, but the top of his head was laid open like somebody had hit him with a knife; but it was a piece of shrapnel that had caught him in the forehead and had gone

all the way across the top of his skull. It had not fractured his skull, but it laid the scalp wide-open, where, with each breath and with each pump of the heart, the scalp would move back and forth, and you could see the shining skull underneath. Now this man's name was Fughs.

Anderson: He later went back to the States on the Lurline. I tried to keep up with his actions, and during the war, he received his discharge--I don't know whether it was medical or regular--and went into the motion picture business. He was put aside, you might say, for possibly six or eight hours for sewing his head up, while we tried our darndest to save these men that were burned. Now his head had,,we gave him gauze compresses to hold on his head to try to soak up any blood or serum that was running out of this cut. But I remember that man very well. He was almost totally bald,

Marcello: How were most of the victims reacting under these circumstances? Did you hear a lot of moaning and groaning and this sort of thing?

Anderson: I don't remember, but I should imagine that, certainly, there was a great deal of pain, and there must have been moaning and groaning.

Marcello: What did you do the next day? What was your procedure the next day?

Anderson: I ran straight through December 7 and the night of December 7, and December 8 was just a continuous working routine on the

ward, There was no break, except maybe to go down to the mess hall to get something to eat in a hurry and rush right back to the ward. Most of the burn victims on the ward could not eat because they were in such horrible shape. Many of them died on us in only a few hours.

Marcello: What did you do with the dead?

Anderson: We had a morgue about the second or third deck that could accommodate approximately six bodies in our refrigerator, which was filled almost immediately. Then those who died after that, that we couldn't take anywhere else, were laid out on the white deck side-by-side...on the deck from one side of the morgue to the other. When that area was filled, we stacked them one on top of the other. And then we stacked them all the way up to the overhead, which was possibly seven or eight foot high. Then another row was started, and they stacked these men, again, all the way across, their bodies all the way to the overhead, until they reached the point where there was only just a little room left to close the doors of the morgue.

Marcello: Did you actually see this?

Anderson: No, I did not see this, but it was related to me by those that carried the bodies down there and came back to the ward-- the men from the wards. But I never went down there.

Marcello: I'm sure that was one of those jobs that you didn't want, first of all.

Anderson: At first it wasn't bad, but about two days later, in that terrible heat, it was a place that was almost unbearable to get close to because of the horrible odor.

Let me relate to you something else that was quite strange that happened on the morning of December 7. The man that ran our tailor shop had gone out Saturday night and had gotten very drunk. He came back in and went into his tailor shop, where he had a bunk, and he went to sleep. It wasn't until around until about twelve o'clock noon on December 7 that he woke up and didn't even know that anything had happened that morning earlier.

Marcello: I would assume that that was quite a shock for him, too, when he saw what went on.

Anderson: Yes, indeed, Yes, indeed.

Marcello: My next question is kind of retrospective. As a result of the Pearl Harbor attack, what did you and your colleagues learn about the kinds of medical care that you had to be prepared to use in future battles as the war went on? What medical lessons were learned as a result of this experience at Pearl? Am I making myself clear?

Anderson: Yes, I understand you, but I don't really believe that we learned a heck of a lot because at the time, compared to modern medicine, we were primitive.

Marcello: Well, let me be more specific with my question. You mentioned that you had a lot of burn victims coming in and that you had

to basically employ makeshift methods in dealing with these burn victims, You had to use the tannic acid. So what had you learned, for example, about burns as a result of the Pearl Harbor experience?

Anderson: I believe we went from that to an ointment a few months later when we were involved with the Battle of the Coral Sea, when we picked up quite a few burn victims, and tried to get away from the tannic acid because it ruined everything it was spilled on.

Marcello: So the point is...

Anderson: We did try to get away from the tannic acid, and we went into some type of ointment that I don't remember the name of now.

Marcello: The point is, in future battles you were going to better prepared for burn victims because you knew that there were going to be more of them, probably.

Anderson: Yes, this is correct. Anytime there was fires on board ship, there was always many critical burn cases.

Marcello: I know, for example, the crew aboard most of those ships learned that you don't go into battle wearing short pants and a T-shirt because that obviously doesn't offer any protection against burns. Men that have on long-sleeved shirts and long trousers probably would have a little bit more protection than somebody that was exposed.

Anderson: Yes, all short sleeves and short trousers were outlawed

immediately. All of those that were actually working in the harbor area and used white uniforms instead of dungarees were required to dip all of their uniforms in coffee. Everybody was running around in yellowish, dirty-looking uniforms that weren't white, except the Navy hospital corpsmen on the hospital ship, and, I presume, everyone over at the naval hospital itself. Everyone else had on whites that were dyed, especially the fleet.

Marcello: What were some of the rumors going around that evening?

Anderson: There were all kinds of rumors. You can guess at any rumor, and it was there. There was no way of telling, really. I think our greatest fear was that there was a massive invasion underway somewhere on the islands. But in talking with the others on the war, we were sure that everybody would fight to the death before we gave up. There wouldn't be any giving up.

Marcello: So you did believe those rumors?

Anderson: Oh, yes.

Marcello: I guess you really had no reason not to believe them, after what had happened that day.

Anderson: All communications from the outside of Pearl Harbor were cut off. We had no idea what had happened in Honolulu or anywhere else.

Marcello: When was the first time you were able to communicate in some

manner with your parents to let them know that you were okay and had not been injured in any way?

Anderson: Recently I saw a postcard that my mother had, a free mail postcard, and it had blocks on the back of it for checking off. We were not allowed to send any messages whatsoever, but this postcard had things like, "I'm injured"; "I'm not injured;" "I'm healthy"; "I am happy," and various things of this type. The men checked off these things and put the address on the front and signed it. No ship's name was allowed on there. Then this was mailed back, and this was the first that my parents heard from me.

Marcello: Do you recall how long after the attack that this would have occurred?

Anderson: Possibly two weeks. My parents knew that I was alive, though, or at least they felt that I was alive, because on about, oh, the third of December I had been into Honolulu and had bought a bunch of Christmas presents and mailed them home. They arrived about December 8 or 9, so they felt sure that I had been off of the ship and bought these things and mailed them home. They just knew I had to be alive (chuckle).

Marcello: When did the Solace leave Pearl Harbor?

Anderson: We left there,,well, actually, let's go back to Chief ~~Cummingham~~ again. We got up a head of steam, cut our chains loose from the buoys, and we pulled out of there in short order and moved and anchored very close to Pearl City.

Marcello: Why did you do that?

Anderson: We were in an area that was extremely vulnerable. We were next to this repair ship with this destroyer, trying to get them repaired and underway, and we were next to another ship that I can't remember the name of, another repair ship on the other side of us. We were just in a very bad place; we wanted to get away from these other ships so that they could shoot at the planes coming through there. We didn't know when the next attack would come or what, so we got out of there as quickly as possible and anchored over at Pearl City. We stayed there at Pearl City until time for us to leave and go south, which was in March.

Marcello: When did you move over to Pearl City? Was that the same day?

Anderson: This was as soon as they could get a head of steam to get the ship underway, which, possibly, was forty-five minutes, maybe less than that, to get the ship underway.

Marcello: You mentioned in March of 1942, you moved south. Where were you heading?

Anderson: We went down to Pangopango and went into the big harbor there. I was working as a mess cook at the time. I remember a huge turtle in the harbor coming up. We were allowed to open the hatches on the side of the ship after we got into port, and I stuck my head out to look around at the sights in the harbor. This was a very wild-looking place with huge palm trees and

rain off and on, and here is this huge sea turtle that came up, right alongside the ship, within just a foot, maybe, just at the edge of the ship, surveying us. It was so big that I jerked my head back in and got a terrible knot on my head, trying to get away from that thing. I didn't know whether it could reach up with that long neck and bite me or not (chuckle).

Marcello: Well, I think that's probably a pretty good place to end this interview, Mr. Anderson. I want to thank you very much for having talked with me this morning. You said a lot of very interesting and important things. Actually, you've said a lot of things I've never heard before, and, of course, that's always the sort of thing we're looking for. I'm sure that scholars are going to find your comments very valuable when they use them to study Pearl Harbor.

Anderson: Thank you.