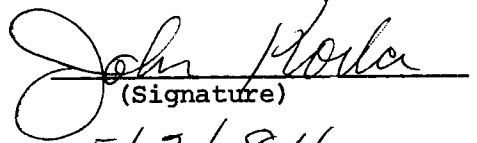


NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION  
NUMBER  
644

Interview with  
JOHN KORBA  
May 3, 1984

Place of Interview: Norfolk, Virginia  
Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello  
Terms of Use: OPEN  
Approved:   
(Signature)  
Date: 5/3/84

COPYRIGHT



1984

THE BOARD OF REGENTS OF NORTH TEXAS STATE  
UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF DENTON

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Coordinator of the Oral History Collection or the University Archivist, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas 76203

Oral History Collection

John Korba

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello                      Date of Interview: May 3, 1984

Place of Interview: Norfolk, Virginia

Dr. Marcello:     This is Ron Marcello interviewing John Korba for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 3, 1984, in Norfolk, Virginia. I am interviewing Mr. Korba 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. Korba, 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. Korba:        I was born in 1922 in Binghamton, New York. I attended Binghamton Central High School, and I left in my senior year to join the Navy.

Dr. Marcello:     Why was it that you decided to leave high school in your senior year?

Mr. Korba:        Well, I was having a little problem in school, and I thought that I was wasting my time there. The town of Binghamton didn't have too much to offer me, and I was worried I might

end up in a shoe factory and work the rest of my life there; and I wanted to get out while I was still young and see the world. I'd never seen the ocean, and I'd never seen a ship before.

Marcello: When was it that you enlisted in the Navy?

Korba: I enlisted on October 16, 1940.

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

Korba: Well, in high school there was a group of us who used to hang out in the cafeteria, and one of my buddies decided he was all "gung-ho" for the Navy; and he went down to take his physical, and he flunked it. He came back, and I says, "How'd you make out?" He says, "They flunked me." He had some medical problem. I said, "I think they'll take anybody in the Navy." So the next day I skipped school, and I went down there; and I took the battery of tests for the Navy, and at that time they were very selective in taking anybody in the Navy. You had to sign for six years--everybody.

So I went down there, and I spent the afternoon down there taking the physical exam and mental exam and all the tests and everything. When I got through, the chief out there, the recruiter, says, "Well, John, you can go anytime you want to." I said, "I'm not joining the Navy. I came down here on a bet to see whether you'd take me or not. I had a little bet going with the kids in school." I left it at that. He said, "Well, if you change your mind, give me

a call.

So right after that--it must have been a week or so or two weeks later--he called me up and says, "There's a draft leaving on Saturday for Newport, Rhode Island. If you'd care to join them, I could fix you right up."

At that time my parents were out of town, and they didn't know anything about this. So I talked to my sister, my oldest sister, and she says, "Well, if that's what you want to do, I'm sure they'll let you go." So I went. When they got back into town, I was gone. I went to Newport, Rhode Island.

Marcello: What were the economic conditions like around Binghamton during that time? Now this was 1940, and the country is gearing up for war and so on. What was the economy like in that area?

Korba: Well, Binghamton's economy stayed pretty constant because it was all dependent on the shoe factories there. Everybody had to wear shoes. Even during the Depression, they were never hit hard because the shoe factory itself made shoes and gave them away. Endicott Johnson, when they made shoes, they made everything associated with shoes. Anything that you wore on your feet, they made. They made ice skates, roller skates, baseball shoes, basketball shoes. They also had their own tanneries and their rubber mills and all. They worked it out where everybody worked so many days, so they weren't really

as hard-pressed as the big cities. But back to your question, in 1940 the economy was pretty stable there, but there wasn't any work outside of the shoe factories there.

Marcello: So it was more or less a dead-end proposition to go into the shoe factories?

Korba: That's right. And usually most of the shoe factories were made up of the people that came from Eastern Europe--Czechoslovakia and Poland--and they worked in the shoe factory. They knew a good deal when they had it. But other than that, none of the young people would have nothing to do with it.

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

Korba: I was very interested in Europe and all...Mussolini. I saved the newspapers and all. It never dawned on me...Japan was in the background. Nobody ever talked about Japan. They were all worried about Mussolini and his blitzkrieg and Hitler and his tactics over there. I used to work in a produce market there on Saturdays, and I used to work on a soft drink truck on Saturdays, too. But it never dawned on me that I'd ever get involved in this. I thought it was so distant, and at that time the country itself was pretty isolationist.

Marcello: What was your parents' reaction when they found that you had decided to go into the Navy?

Korba: They were pretty upset. My father used to tell me six years

is a lifetime. I didn't realize it until I was in there that long.

Marcello: I assume that they did reconcile themselves to the fact once you had made the decision.

Korba: Oh, yes.

Marcello: You mentioned that you took your boot camp at Newport, Rhode Island?

Korba: That's right.

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

Korba: About six weeks.

Marcello: So they were already cutting boot camp back considerably, then?

Korba: Oh, yes, and they had an accelerated course there. The company I was in was made up mostly of people from the New England states, and they picked up a few strays out of New York. We were the first Company 52 that went through Newport, Rhode Island, because they used to go to Company 50, and then that was the end of the year, and they'd start all over. But they were trying to fill the fleet up because they never had enough men on the ships. They had skeleton crews on them all. They couldn't go to sea for any length of time.

Marcello: None of those ships, I guess, were up to their full complement prior to the attack.

Korba: None of them.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened in boot camp that you think we need to get as part of the record, other than

the fact that it was an accelerated boot training?

Korba: No. Really, boot camp...all it was was...they kept track of you. They gave you all of your shots and everything, and they wanted to see whether you'd take regimentation more than anything else. Other than that, we marched and did the rifle drill and all. Other than that, it was pretty cut-and-dried.

Korba: They loaded us on a train, and they gave us leave after boot camp was over. They kept us in isolation there all the time, of course. Once we graduated, they sent us home, I think, for about ten or twelve days. We reported back to Newport, and they loaded us on a train...I think there was about three trains that left for the West Coast. We all went to San Pedro.

Marcello: Now at the time that you left Newport, did you know what your permanent station or ship was going to be?

Korba: Oh, yes. They gave us all the ships and stations where we were going.

Marcello: And was it at this time that you knew that you were going aboard the West Virginia?

Korba: That's right. That's right.

Marcello: Was that voluntary, or were you simply assigned the West Virginia?

Korba: Oh, no. You know how the service works. They gave us all this battery of tests and everything. They ask you what your preference is, and I thought, gee, aviation was something



new, and I said, "Jeez, I'd like to be in aviation metalsmith. I'd like that. I can do metalsmith work." I had some in high school, and I'm quite mechanically-minded. I think they picked one fellow to go to the school out of about four companies. They said, "All the rest of you are just general service." They sent us all out. They divided us up amongst all the ships out there.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of being assigned to a battleship at that time?

Korba: Jeez, I'd never seen a battleship. The biggest thing I ever saw was a four-pipe destroyer that pulled into Newport. It was one of those that we were giving to England at the time--the fifty destroyers we gave England. It came into Newport, and I said, "Gee, what a sin to give that beautiful ship away." It was all painted. That was the first warship I had ever seen.

Marcello: And where did you then pick up the West Virginia?

Korba: Well, we pulled into San Pedro, and the train pulled right into the Fleet Landing. We all marched off, and they had people out there that separated us into who was going to what ship. We all went down on the dock, and the battleships all steamed in there majestically to Long Beach, California. It's a great, big harbor. You could see them all coming, and, boy, one was bigger than the other one. Our eyes all popped out of our heads. They just came down from Bremerton

in maneuvers, and as soon as they came in and anchored, then they sent their boats up to get us. They picked us up at the Fleet Landing there and took us out to our respective ships out there.

Marcello: Now at this point, had the Pacific Fleet not yet been sent to the Hawaiian Islands on a more or less permanent basis?

Korba: That's right. That's right. They operated out of...their home port was Long Beach.

Marcello: Okay, so you go aboard the West Virginia, and I assume you're feeling pretty "salty," since you just got out of boot camp. What kind of reception did you get when you went aboard the West Virginia?

Korba: Well, in the old Navy, if you wasn't on there for twenty years, you was the lowest thing on earth. You had to carry all of your possessions at once. They gave you your seabag, and the damn seabag and all weighed more than I did because I was just a gangly young kid eighteen years old. I think all of my baggage weighed more than I did. You had to struggle up...you're not used to walking up a ladder strapped alongside a ship and going up there. As soon as we got aboard ship, we saluted the colors and all. We all were instructed on the landing to keep our mouths shut and everything.

When we got lined up there, they told us to line up according to size and leave our baggage here. I was pretty tall at the time...so we all lined up. They put me in the deck force in the 6-A Division. They manned the antiaircraft

batteries, and each projectile that they used was fixed ammunition. It weighed something like eighty-something pounds. The division I went into, all the fellows in there were giants. They could pick them things up like pencils. They'd throw them around.

They took all the tall fellows, and they put us in the 6-A Division. Then they marched us off. When we got to the living department, they gave us a locker. I don't think that locker was more than, oh, about thirty inches square and about twelve inches deep, and you were supposed to get all of your possessions in there outside of your hammock. We had hammocks. We had no bunks in the Navy. They had a compartment, I would say, maybe about twice as big as this room here. We must have had a hundred and some men in that compartment.

Marcello: So there was a hundred and some men in a compartment that was about twice the size as a motel room?

Korba: That's right. All of the "boots" that were in there used to sleep in hammocks. We also ate in that compartment, and the mess tables were on the overhead. You fold them up, and you stick them in there. Then at night, for each meal they take the tables down.

They had a mess cook for each two mess tables. The mess cook was responsible for all the knives, forks, spoons, dishes, and all. He had a mess number. He was also responsible to

make sure that everybody that was at that table got enough to eat. We had a mess captain--the senior man in that division. He sat at the head of the table and made sure that somebody didn't take two potatoes when he should have had one.

Marcello: The food was more or less served by seniority, too, wasn't it?

Korba: Yes. It always started at the head of the table, and you was on the other end where the "boots" sat, and you always sat at the same seat. If you didn't show up, the mess cook would know who was missing. They kept track of everything.

Marcello: You've mentioned several things here that I would like to pursue a little bit further with regards to the old Navy. You mentioned the hammocks awhile ago. Describe what it was like to sleep on a hammock.

Korba: A hammock was very comfortable--very comfortable--because once you get in your hammock, it rolls up. You actually roll up into it. You could actually sleep outside in the rain, and you don't get wet because you just got a little pocket there.

Marcello: In other words, it kind of wraps around you when you get in it.

Korba: That's right. Also, when it's hanging in a ship, the ship could roll, and it's like a pendulum. You never feel the roll or sway of the ship. A battleship never rolled or pitched too much, anyway. The West Virginia was 624 feet long, and she had about an eighty-six-foot beam on her, and she weighed

about 33,000 tons. So when she got underway, we were speed demons. We could do about fifteen knots wide-open.

Marcello: Then, of course, those hammocks had to be stowed every morning, did they not?

Korba: That's right. Every morning, when you got out of your hammock, you lashed it, and you put it in a bedding bag, and you stored it away. You had like a...hammock netting, they called it. It was a compartment on the outboard side of the ship, just on the other side of the benches, and you put all your stuff in there.

Marcello: And you put your hammock in a bedding bag?

Korba: Right.

Marcello: Did you pull a tour of mess cooking?

Korba: I used to mess cook, but it was only like on a daily basis. Whenever there was a mess cook on leave or went ashore and they gave him so many days, I was like the substitute mess cook.

Marcello: That's the only mess cooking you picked up?

Korba: That's right.

Marcello: How come?

Korba: I don't know. I was in the deck force only about probably eight or nine months. I happened to run into a fellow that was on there for about eight years on the West Virginia, and he was from Binghamton. I knew his brother real well, and he knew my sisters. He was a prize fighter on there. His

name was Steve Marezk. I saw him fighting one day out there. We had a smoker--they used to have smokers--and I was sitting up on top of the turret, and he was cooling off underneath it after the fight. I said, "Hey, Marezk, are you from Binghamton?" He says, "Yeah." I said, "Have you got a brother named Milton?" He says, "Yeah." I said, "Well, I went to school with him." He says, "What's your name?" I says, "Korba." He says, "Gee, I know all the Korbas. You got three sisters, don't you?" I says, "Yeah. I remember when you joined the Navy." He says, "That's six years ago." He left just before the blitz. He says, "What division are you in?" I says, "The Sixth Division." He says, "You better get out of that division. You'll never get anywhere. Come down and we'll make an engineer out of you." He was a boiler-maker. So I says, "Okay." He says, "I'll see you as soon as I take a shower down below. I'll look you up." And he was a first class. He used to walk on water--a first class petty officer. Man, they were something else.

So he came, and he took me all over the ship. At that time, although you were the crew of the ship, you never went through anybody else's compartment. Each division had their own living quarters, and that was their domain. Even where they had the scuttlebutts, where you went and got a drink of water, you better just go in there and get a drink of water and get out of there because if you start lingering, somebody would want to know what you're doing in there. You

didn't belong in there.

Marcello: You didn't go in any part of that ship unless you had some business being there.

Korba: That's right. He took me all over the engineering space. I was very impressed though. We finally went up, and we talked to the chief engineer there. He was a lieutenant commander by the name of Bedford. Jeez, I had never talked to an officer in my life. You never got to talk to the first class or the second...you were lucky to talk to the third class. Anyway, he says, "What would you like to be in the engineer's force?"

I was very impressed with their machine shop. All of their lathes and all of their machines looked like a shipyard. Everything was shining and everything. The decks were shining like chrome plating. It was very nice. I didn't see anybody work down there. Everybody had clean dungarees on, a white hat, and were drinking coffee. I said, "Boy, this is for me. I'll get out of that deck force in a minute." He says, "We have no openings in the machine shop. Do you know anything about electricity?" I said, "I could fix a lamp. I'm willing to learn." He said, "We'll make an electrician out of you. Go back to your division and put in a request chit for a transfer."

I never knew how important I was on that ship until I put in for a transfer. Everybody disapproved it, and they black-balled me. Finally, the officer, a guy by the name of Lieutenant

Eddy, called me to his room. I'd never talked to an officer. He called me up to his room. I was just a seaman second class. He really chewed me out. He says, "You know, we were counting on you for this." I said, "I didn't even know you realized I was aboard this ship." He really made me feel like...he said, "I'm going to disapprove this." He said, "You'll be sorry you ever put in for a transfer out of this division. This is the best division on the ship. Are you having trouble getting along?" I said, "I get along with everybody." He said, "I never heard any bad reports on you or anything." I said, "Well, if you disapprove it, I guess it's disapproved." Everybody disapproved it, but when it got back to the exec's office--this lieutenant commander down there--he says, "Git!"

Then when they transferred me to the engineer's force, I was a "deck ape" to these engineers. They wouldn't have nothing to do with me. I couldn't go back to my division. I was a regular bastard on there. I said, "Jeez, what did I get myself in for here?" They could be very clannish--each division. They were a family by themselves. So I had to start all over in the electrical gang. I worked for a few fellows there, and I got along good with them. It was altogether different.

I'll never forget that when I went down, they put me in the power shop. They used to transfer you every month or so.



They'd put you in another one so you'd get a feel of the whole ship so you could do something. I was in a lighting shop for a while. Then I was in a power shop and then the heavy power shop, and then I was down in the engine rooms. When I was in the power shop...we used to make all the cooks feed us and give us anything we wanted. Everybody blackballed everybody on there. So I came in there, and I was sitting in the shop after working hours, and the first class says, "Korba, go up in the bake shop, take your white hat with you, get it full of eggs, and see what kind of pies they're baking up there. Get three or four pies, and then go down to the butcher shop and get some bacon and some steaks."

So I go up there, and the guy looks at me--the guy in the bake shop--and he says, "What do you want?" I said, "I'm from the power shop. I was sent up here by Roscoe, second class. He told me to get a hatful of eggs and a couple of pies and a couple loaves of hot bread." He says, "If you don't get the hell out of here, I'll crown you!" He was a great, big guy.

So I go back down to the shop. Roscoe says, "What happened?" I said, "That big Polack up there told me that if I didn't get the hell out of his bake shop, he was going to crown me. I left." He said, "Take a couple of guys with you, with your tool box, up there and take their ventilators out. Tear them out. Cut the wires and bring them down."

He says, "Better yet, we'll get even with them tomorrow. Go up there just take some tools with you and take their bread slicing machine out and bring the whole damn thing down here. It's time for an overhaul." We cut the wires completely out of that thing and rewound the motors. After that we never had anymore trouble. The guys were down there every day, wanting to know where their slicing machine was. "We're working on it. We're working on it." After that they'd give you the bake shop.

Marcello: Let me back up and ask you a few more general questions. What was the food like aboard the West Virginia?

Korba: You know, that was the first ship ever I ate on. They never gave you too much. It was good quality, but they never gave you...you'd never get fat on that ship. I'll tell you, I used to always tell them, "For what they fed the West Virginia, I've eaten on a destroyer." But then they were only allowed something like forty cents a day or something.

Marcello: Per man?

Korba: Per man. If you had fifteen people you was feeding that day, or twenty...you had a number, a mess number, and the cook knew how many people you was feeding. He'd give you that many pork shops, that many potatoes--just one of each. If you went up there and worked extra hours for the cook and do all of his work, he might throw a couple extras on there, and that way you'd feed them a couple extra pieces to your

crew, and then you'd get a tip.

Marcello: In other words, what you're saying is, come payday, for instance, the people at the table would chip in some money in a plate or something like that?

Korba: That's right--for the mess cook. That's why it was very important that all of his spare time was up there helping the cooks out--so he could bum, borrow, or steal anything. When they'd provisioned ship, that's why everybody would be up there carrying these supplies down to the storeroom. By the time they left the main deck where the stuff came aboard, it would never get in the storeroom. They'd hide it in all the peacoat lockers and everything to have night supplies.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned that it was not uncommon for a person to be aboard a ship for twenty years perhaps.

Korba: That's right.

Marcello: Was that a relatively common thing in the service at that time, especially for those who were career men?

Korba: That's right. Most of the sailors that were on there...I know that the electrician was on there for twenty years. He went on there as a seaman, and he came off as a chief electrician. But that was good in a way. They never transferred anybody. To get in the right perspective, though, like, on the West Virginia we had about 1,400 men on there, and you could almost count on two hands the number of people who were married.

Marcello: I guess the Navy basically discouraged marriage at that time, did they not?

Korba: You couldn't get married unless you was a second class.

Marcello: And evidently the Navy did nothing so far as providing quarters ashore or something like that.

Korba: No. They never even gave you a subsistence allowance or anything. You had to shift for yourself basically. It was altogether different than it is now.

Marcello: When did it become easy to get the transfers? After the war started?

Korba: Well, they had to. Getting back to Pearl Harbor, the only thing we lost at Pearl Harbor was men. The ships...they should have left them there. The only thing we lost was trained men. The Navy was accelerating their building program so fast that they had to share the wealth. I went aboard one ship that was put into commission, and there was three of us that had ever been on a ship before. All of our benefits came out... if it wasn't for the war, we'd have still have had nothing. At one time we used to have to pay 15¢...they took a pay cut in 1936, I think it was--voluntarily. Then they used to pay fifteen cents a month or something for hospital care.

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

Korba: Oh, man, you was a genius if you made second class in eight years or something. You was actually shunned because...it was so slow that they figured you'd make chief just before you

got your twenty years in. It was a matter of building up. It was a matter of the seniority kept building up, and you could tell which one was going to make chief or not.

Marcello: And, of course, you had to take the fleet-wide examinations and so on, too, did you not?

Korba: That's right. Well, within the ship itself, they had courses that you had to fill in to qualify to take the test; and you had the practical factors to go through. It was up to the divisions to keep this. Then you took fleet competitive exams.

Marcello: And there had to be an opening.

Korba: That's right. That's right, because the Navy at that time was probably in the neighborhood of 600,000, and you only can have so many petty officers, and the ship only rated so many petty officers. The ship didn't want to rate you because they were going to lose you once they got over their quota-- even on a fleet-wide exam because you was filling the billets in the fleet, not for that ship.

Marcello: And then, of course, promotions accelerated quite rapidly after the war started.

Korba: Oh, I made chief in 1944--in four years. Actually, it was three years because it was in 1941 when the war started good. In four years I was permanent appointment. You made chief, and then a year later you made permanent appointment. Within that one-year period, they could send you back if you messed up or anything, if you didn't do your job for any reason.

They didn't have to give you a permanent appointment. Then you'd have to be court-martialed to get busted after that year.

Marcello: I'm still curious about these men who'd be on a ship for twenty years. I guess that ship was literally their home.

Korba: Oh, it was. Each division...if you ever went on a ship, that's why they used to wear their hatbands with the ship's name was on the hatband. The divisions even all hung out in the same bars and the same restaurants. If you were ever on the beach, you never said anything about the ship because somebody, even on your own ship, would work you over. He'd drag you aside: "Don't ever talk about the West Virginia like that. It's all right aboard but not on a beach."

Marcello: Did you have very many Asiatic sailors aboard the West Virginia during that period when you were aboard her?

Korba: No. See, if you messed up in the Navy, they would shanghai you. You caught the next boat to the China Station. I'd never seen anybody come back from the China Station because the ships stayed out there forever. They never did come back.

Marcello: I'm also curious as to why you had problems getting that transfer from the deck division down into engineering or into the electrical gang. Why was it that they didn't want to let you go?

Korba: That was an insult to them because the engineers and the deck force...to think somebody in the deck force didn't like

it there...they wanted to go down below and be a snipe. A snipe would come up on deck, and the deck force would get on them: "You got dirty shoes! You're going to mess up our decks!"

Marcello: Also, was there competition aboard that ship for the new men who were coming on? You mentioned awhile ago that those ships were not up to their complement.

Korba: That's right. They didn't want to lose anybody because they had no other source of supplies than the "boots" coming on there. Out in Hawaii we weren't getting any new men. What we had, that was it.

Marcello: Approximately how many men came on when you went aboard?

Korba: Oh, I would say there was about 150.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that this lieutenant commander more or less pulled some strings to finally get you transferred?

Korba: Yes. Well, this was standard practice. Nobody wanted to let anybody go. They'd always shoot down all of the transfers. But they also respected each other on the officer level. That lieutenant commander was so much higher than the other guy that he would probably told him in the wardroom.

Marcello: In other words, this was done more or less as a favor to that lieutenant commander rather than as a favor to you.

Korba: That's right. They weren't doing me any favors. They cared less about me. I was a warm body for them. They had me trained on a job, and then they'd have to train somebody else.

Marcello: Why was it that you wanted to get out of the deck force?

Korba: Well, I figured I was going to stay in the Navy, and I wanted to make the most of it for six years. In the first year in the Navy, we only made \$21 a month, and then we went up to \$36 a month after three months. I figured that that first year I saved more money making that much money than I did all of the rest of the time I was in the Navy until my last year --the twentieth year (chuckle).

Marcello: One of the jobs that was done on the deck force--and it's of interest to me, so let me ask you about it--was holystoning the deck. Did you ever get involved in that?

Korba: Oh, everybody did.

Marcello: How did it work. Describe how holystoning worked.

Korba: Well, it was usually on a Friday evening. We would wet down the decks with saltwater, and then they would take lime and put lime on them, and then we'd throw sand over them. The forward part of the ship...they called it the sand locker. It was right in the bow--up in a peak tank, they called it. They'd load sand in there, and then they'd go down there and get so many buckets of sand, and then you'd throw it all over the deck. The next day, Saturday, when the sun came out and everything, it would bleach them. All the deck was covered in sand and saltwater. It was damp. Then you'd take a piece of brick--a stone. It was actually...it was like a fire brick. It was square. It was probably about four inches square.



A half-brick is what it was, and in the center of it there would be a little hollow in there, and you would stick your stick in the center of it. Then it would slide back and forth. You'd get a whole group of fellows, and you'd go right down the deck with it. That would, like, sand the deck--just like sandpaper. Then you'd wash it off with the fire hose--down the drain into the "drink"--and then when the sun came out, with all that lime on it, it would bleach it out, and it would be white as that paper.

Marcello: And those decks were teakwood, is that correct?

Korba: Teak, right. Actually, they had steel underneath them, but they were plugged. They had bolts holding them in there. That's why if you went underneath that deck, all you'd see were nuts coming through there.

Marcello: As you look back on life aboard that battleship in the pre-Pearl Harbor period, how would you describe the morale? Was the West Virginia a happy ship?

Korba: Oh, the West Virginia was great. It was like going to college. I had never been to college, but we had...we'd get up about five o'clock in the morning, and the mess cook was responsible for getting our coffee before we did anything after hammocks went. We got out of bed, and everybody got up at the crack of dawn. Then we went up and scrubbed the decks.

Then we went down and ate breakfast. Then when we came back up, we went and practiced on the loading machine. There

was a fellow there with a stopwatch checking each crew and making sure...and we could load them faster than those automatic guns and fire them and all. Then we had so many drills, and in the deck force our main job was firing them guns and taking care of the topside of the ship. Of course, there was working parties.

By about ten o'clock, we were just about wrapped up. Then each division had rowing teams, baseball teams, basketball teams, swimming teams. Everybody participated. If you didn't have duty that day--didn't stand any watches--hell, by noon you could get in a boat, and if you didn't even participate in any of the activities, you could go over as a cheering section for them. They'd get in a boat, and we'd be gone.

**Marcello:** I gather that sports and participation in sports was encouraged in the service at that time.

**Korba:** Oh, I think everybody...you know, they only had so many men, and they wanted to get as many teams in...they would put a lot of money on it. Everything was very competitive between all the groups in there. Before we went to Hawaii, all the battle-ships had football teams, and they couldn't get none of the colleges to play them--none of them. None of them would play them.

**Marcello:** Did they do active recruiting for star athletes in the Navy?  
I know they did it at Schofield Barracks and places like that.

I was wondering if that occurred aboard the battleships?

Korba: I don't think it did because all of them fellows...we had some giants on there. Most of the fellows on there--in the Navy at that time--were there from the Depression. They come out of school and colleges and all, and they couldn't get a job anywhere. They were very fortunate even to go in the Navy. That's why the caliber of people we had in the Navy was pretty high at that time.

Marcello: You mentioned something that I need to pursue. You mentioned that they felt that they were fortunate to be in the Navy. I think that had a lot to do with the high morale, too, did it not?

Korba: Oh, yes, they were very fortunate. A good example of that was when we...the Navy always got the gravy, really. In the Army, just before the war started, on weekends they had an exchange program. We'd send a hundred sailors out to Schofield, and they'd send a hundred soldiers and spend the weekend on the ship. The soldiers couldn't get over it, They thought the chow was great. I says, "Holy crud! I wonder what the hell they're eating!" They really liked it.

And another thing they did on there, on the weekends I think for 50¢ they used to have a train that took you out to where right now they have all the surfboard contests and everything. That used to be Camp Andrews out there, and the Navy had a rest camp there. They used to send the crews

off of these ships over there. It cost you 50¢ for the weekend. If there was a 150 people going off the West Virginia, they would have to furnish the food and the cook to go with that group. Of course, we all went out there, and we slept in tents, and we had a blanket to sleep on. We had the beach right there. I think that on Monday morning they'd bring us back on that little Toonerville trolley they had out there.

Marcello: Awhile ago, you also mentioned that your friend or acquaintance from Binghamton who was a boxer aboard the West Virginia. You mentioned that he was in his first enlistment, and he was a first class?

Korba: That's right. He extended once, but he had about six years in the Navy. He got out of the Navy, by the way.

Marcello: Am I to assume that perhaps if one were a good athlete, one got advanced a little bit more rapidly?

Korba: Well, it all depends on what rate you was in, too. See, he was a boilermaker, and I think that was...they were going from coal to oil, and that was a big transition. Another thing is that all of the ships just went to electricity not too long before that. The West Virginia was an electric drive ship. She had electric motors there that sent her through the water. All of them ships were very light-powered because I think they were scared. We had eight boilers on that thing, but they were low pressure steam and all. The

West Virginia was built after the German battleships. Even all of our guns and everything were more or less of German design.

Marcello: You mentioned that this individual, the one who was a boxer, was a boilermaker. Promotion in many cases, or advancement in rank, did depend upon which rating you were in, did it not?

Korba: That's right. That's right.

Marcello: Is this one of the reasons that you switched from the deck force to either engineering or the electrical gang?

Korba: Oh, yes. In the engineers force, rates were a lot freer than in the deck force.

Marcello: In fact, I guess the deck force is probably the slowest almost, isn't it?

Korba: That's right. A boatswain's mate...gee, if you were a coxswain... but if you was a first class fireman, that was equivalent to a coxswain because the rates were that much different. That way you could go to second class, and, hell, you was actually a higher rate than the other guy in the right arm rate.

Marcello: How would you rate the on-the-job training that you received aboard the West Virginia to become an electrician?

Korba: Well, that's pretty hard to calculate. I don't think they really trained you that much because...and you don't realize that. If you spent twenty years...I knew a lot of fellows on there, and all they ever did was take care of the lighting on the ship. That's all they had to do--unscrew the light

bulbs and put new ones in. And they never got anything. They would be lost souls if they ever went on a destroyer. When the West Virginia was sunk, I went to a destroyer, and, man, on there anybody can do anybody's job. I don't care what your rate was.

On the West Virginia, I'll tell you a little story. After they put me as an electrician, I used to stand switchboard watches. This switchboard was about twice as big as this room--very impressive. It had great, big switches--all copper--shining and everything. I went down there, and I qualified. The guy told me, "When we were going to shift generators, throw this switch and that switch," and all this stuff. I was there three or four times when they did it. I said, "It ain't nothing. I think they're making a big deal out of nothing." So after I got the stand watches by myself down there, I was still a seaman, really. They didn't even change my rate. I had to take a fireman exam to get that.

So one day I was down there, and the phone rings, and this was just before Pearl Harbor. The phone rings, and the guy says, "Korba, this is so-and-so. I'm down in the engine room. We're going to shift generators. Are you ready?" I said, "Sure. Send it to me." So he threw his switches, and I went and I threw all of mine. I was sitting down there, and I had my shoes off. I didn't want to mess up the deck. You could see yourself in that deck down there.

Nobody was allowed down there except the guy on watch. There was a big ladder. Nobody was allowed down there. I was writing in the log what I did--I shifted the load. Pretty soon here comes a whole train of people down there--the first class, the second class, the chief, the warrant officer, the chief engineer, the electrical officer. They all come steaming down there. The second class gets me aside. He says, "We're going to shift the load. I want you to stay and watch how we do it." I says, "You're going to shift the load again? What do you mean? We already shifted it." He says, "You did?"

So he went back, and he spread the news to everybody. They all looked at me, and they got up the ladder and went up (chuckle). And the guy says, "You did pretty good. The lights didn't even blink." That's how you can tell if something happened. "You didn't even blink the lights. How long have you been down here?" I said, "I don't know. I've been here a couple months down here on the switchboard." They never said anything, but when I got back in the ship the next day, the chief saw me, and he says, "Don't ever do that. You embarrassed everybody." (laughter)

**Marcello:** We were talking about the morale awhile ago. When did you decide to make the Navy a career?

**Korba:** Boy, that's a hard question.

**Marcello:** Had you already made up your mind before Pearl Harbor?

Korba: You've got to be kidding. I had five more years to go. That was the farthest thing in my mind. All the time I was in the Navy, I never even finished twenty years. I did nineteen years, six months, and twelve days. I had opportunities to become an officer and all many times, but I told them, "You better give it to somebody who's going to stay in because I'm not."

It was strange. I joined the Navy in 1940 for six years, so my time was up in 1946. In 1946 the war was over, and everybody was home, and nobody was working in 1946. So I was on a ship down in Florida, and the captain says, "Are you going to sign over or aren't you?" I said, "I don't know." He says, "Why don't you go home. I'll send you home for two months. If you want the third month, call me up, and I'll give you another thirty days extension. That way you'll make up your mind." So I went home.

When I was in Florida, I had access to all the brand-new boats down there. I had my own boat--the captain's gig off one of the ships down there. I was in the Reserve Fleet. I'd go fishing anytime I wanted to. All I ever done was wear shorts down there. I was darker than the colored people down there.

So when I went home I was like a fish out of water. There was nobody working. Everybody belonged to the "Fifty-two/Twenty Club." They were drawing \$20 a week for fifty-two weeks.



All they ever did was play basketball and drink beer down there. I said, "Boy, this isn't for me." I even went out looking for a job. They thought I was crazy. I was single at the time. My mother said, "Are you going to stay?" I said, "No, I'm going to go back. I'll go back to Florida. I'm not going to stay up here."

So I went back to Florida, and I shipped over for four years. That put me in 1950. Meanwhile, I went back and I married the girl I went to school with. I married her in 1948. I was going to get out of the Navy, so when 1950 came up, she says, "Are you going to stay in or get out?" I says, "I don't know. Let me get out. I'll get out of the Navy. Let me try it. No problem."

So I couldn't get out. They wouldn't let anybody out because the Korean War was on. So they gave me, I think, a lot of money--\$700 or something to ship over. That's the most money I had at one time in my life (chuckle). So I told my wife, "We're getting \$700 if I ship over." I says, "I'll ship over for four years, and then we're either going to get into this thing real deep or it'll be over." At that time after that, I had my ten years in, so I said, "Well, I might as well stay in."

Meanwhile, I got transferred. I was in Bayonne in the 1950's when my time was up. I had a chance there to make lieutenant or JG(junior grade). I says, "No, I'm going to get

out of the Navy." Meanwhile, they needed somebody...they wanted me to volunteer to go to Washington to work on the White House. That's when they were reconstructing it. They were going to put dehumidifiers in, and that's what I was involved in at that time. So I said, "I'm not volunteering for nothing. You don't volunteer for nothing in the Navy. If they want to send me...I'm general service, so I'll go. I never volunteer for a ship. You can't bitch if you volunteer for it."

So I went to Washington for thirty days, and I worked in the White House with Harry Truman and all that bunch in there. Harry Vaughn was the military aide there. Instead of being there for thirty days, I was there for three years (chuckle). At that time they were trying to make a warrant officer out of me. I said, "I can't take warrant. I'll lose money." I was making more money than a warrant was. I'd have to go back in pay. I said, "I'm going to get out of the Navy, anyway."

At that time I really did try to get out of the Navy. I used to call up the Bureau of the Chief of Naval Personnel and tell him that I'd like to resign: "Just take me off." I said, "I'll give you all the money that they paid me for shipping over. I'll pay you back that money, so it will keep the books...just forget about you ever knew me." He says, "We can't do that. There's a war on. The Korean War is on." I forgot all about it. He says, "We can't do it."

Marcello: So you eventually decided, then, to stay in for the whole twenty?

Korba: I said I might as well stay in, yes.

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

Korba: I thought it was great because I never was there before. I was an eighteen-year-old. I says, "Boy, I've seen more...." Everything was going pretty fast. I went across country. I'm in California there, and we went to sea a couple of times off San Clemente out there before we went to the islands.

The West Virginia was supposed to...we weren't supposed to have been out there at all on December 7. Our sister ship, the Colorado, was having problems, and they sent her to the yard. They actually put the parts that were for the West Virginia on the Colorado, and when the Colorado was supposed to be out there to relieve us before December 7, I think somebody sabotaged her--they really did. They messed her engines up, and she got laid over, so we were there in her place.

Marcello: Now by the time that you got to Pearl Harbor...which would have been when, incidentally? Do you recall when the West Virginia went out there on a more or less permanent basis?

Korba: Right after Christmas in 1940.

Marcello: So you had not been in the Navy too long, actually, before the West Virginia went out there?

Korba: Actually about three or four months.

Marcello: Were you looking forward to a tropical paradise and all this sort of thing?

Korba: Yes, I heard about it, but I had never seen anything like that. I never was out of Binghamton, really--not very far. I'd been to Pennsylvania and around there. I thought it would be nice. The first time the ship went in there, we didn't have any money to go ashore, so we walked. We walked from Pearl Harbor all the way into Honolulu. You know, we never got too much money in the Navy. We used to live on pineapples because you could go in the pineapple factory down there, and they'd give you a tour, and after the tour was over, they'd let you eat all the pineapple you wanted. They'd have it all cut up in slices and the juices in there. It was all ice-cold. I'll never forget that (chuckle).

Marcello: By the time you got out to Pearl Harbor, you were still not in the electrical department, were you?

Korba: No.

Marcello: That occurred after you were out at Pearl?

Korba: That's right.

Marcello: Describe for me what a typical training exercise was like for the West Virginia in that pre-Pearl Harbor period. For instance, normally, when would the West Virginia put to sea on a training exercise? In other words, what day of the week?

Korba: The West Virginia and all the battleships...at one time there was fifteen of them out there. There was fifteen battleships

out there, and they, of course, were in divisions. There was usually three or five in a division, and then a squadron would make up five of them or six of them. We used to go out in groups that way. Each group would go out by themselves-- three or four ships. It was very impressive. I don't know what they were trying to prove because we'd all get behind each other and follow each other around. They used to tow sleeves. We all carried airplanes. A lot of times when we were out to sea, we'd shoot these airplanes off, and they'd go back into Pearl Harbor and pick up our mail and bring it out to us. We'd usually stay out there for five or six days. We'd usually leave on a Monday and come back in the following Friday.

Marcello: And then would another division perhaps go out on Monday again?

Korba: That's right. They rotated. Every once in awhile they'd say, "Well, we're going to stay in an extra week, depending on...." About every other one was a flagship. They had enough admirals out there for every other one.

We'd go out and have these little exercises at night, and they'd run into storms. A couple of times we went out there, and in twenty-four hours they painted the whole ship black. A beautiful gray ship--beautiful. They went and they painted the whole thing black because they were going to have a night ...divide the Navy into two groups, and they were going to

attack each other, and they figured they could sneak in. They had nothing like radar at that time. They were going to sneak up on each other, see. What happened is that they used lamp black--a flat black paint. You know, when you get salt crystals on that flat black and when the moon hits it, it shines. It's iridescent (chuckle). You get salt on there, and you can't wash it off. It won't come off. Somebody got the bright idea that if they used some oil, you could take it right off like a shine. So they got all this oil, and they went over the whole ship, and they shined that thing up. That thing was worse than a white ship at night then.

We used to go out there and have the destroyers sneak up on us. We used to get sunk everytime we went out there. Even Nimitz, during the attack on Pearl Harbor, said it was very fortunate because the Navy is always a war behind. These ships would have been ideal...the West Virginia was ideal. She was the ultimate at the end of World War I. She was completed, I think, in 1923. So she was the best they had, and she was the newest battleship they had in that class--the five of them that they built. There was the Colorado, the West Virginia, and the Maryland. There's three of them. We had 16-inch guns. The California and the Tennessee had 14-inch guns. But we had the big sticks. They basically were identical ships. They were the five best that the Navy had, and they were called the "Big Five." They were always behind. The fire

control, it was something to be desired. I used to watch them 16-inch guns. You could see them like footballs. They'd trail each other.

Marcello: In other words, when those projectiles were fired, they were so large that you could actually follow them, could you not?

Korba: Yes, you could see them. They were like footballs in the air. The whole ship would move sideways when they fired them.

Marcello: When they fired a salvo?

Korba: Yes. They would fire about seventeen miles away. You could see them at the top.

Marcello: I assume they didn't fire those weapons too often, did they? That was rather expensive, wasn't it?

Korba: Every once in awhile. Oh, yes, at that time. But it was nothing compared with what a missile costs. It was pretty crude when you think about it. They fired this projectile that weighed something like 2,700 pounds, and depending on what their range was was the amount of powder they put behind it to push it out. The bags were a hundred pounds--each bag of powder--and they were silk bags. It was all done mechanically on hydraulic things. They would fire them guns, and I thought they...the first one would be low or high, and then the second one would be just opposite, and the third one they'd lay right in there.

Marcello: It had to be impressive to an eighteen-year-old.

Korba: Oh, yes. But the guns we had, the antiaircraft guns...even

the planes that we had that time would come in there, and they would come dive-bombing on us. They would score hits all over us. Because of our directors on the guns and all, we couldn't be fast enough for them.

Marcello: What kind of antiaircraft armament did the West Virginia have in that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Korba: We had 5-inch .25's. They were fixed ammunition, all manually loaded. Our fire control system was much to be desired. Even Nimitz says that they were lucky they shot down any planes at all with the guns. All of the ships that weren't sunk at Pearl Harbor went through the whole war with all that junk on there.

Marcello: It wasn't until after Pearl that you got the 20-millimeters and the 40-millimeters put on your ships.

Korba: Yes. Well, they were all right for in close. I think they were more psychological reasons. They were all right. Even on a kamikaze coming at you, you could fill them full of lead, and he's still coming at you. He had the momentum, so unless he blew up, the force was there, and he'd crash into you.

Marcello: So if anybody was observing the activities of the Fleet, it wouldn't have taken a genius to pretty soon figure out what the pattern was.

Korba: Oh, I think so. I know what you're getting at, but I really think, when you get down to the basics, you can go downtown anywhere, and even you can ask anybody, "When's the California



coming back?" "Oh, she'll be in on Tuesday." Even if they have a change of schedule. The whole idea was that even with all this intelligence going on to find out where the ships were at, they really blew it because the Japanese really didn't want the ships in Pearl Harbor--they really didn't--and they were mad because they were in it because they knew the water wasn't deep enough, and they knew that anything they could sink could be salvaged. It was maybe a Godsend that it happened that way. I've been reading all the history and all the books that they've written on this thing, and even in my own mind, if I had all of this knowledge, what would I have done? What would I have done? You couldn't very well say, "Well, I would have told the fleet that they're coming," because you got to remember that all of the admirals out there thought those ships were something. They would have gone to sea with them ships, and we'd have lost the men. We didn't lose the men this time. We only lost...the Navy got away with nothing. They lost 2,200 men, and a thousand of them were on one ship. If they had went to sea and had been caught out there, they would have sunk...and they would have never found them. They would have lost everybody. You could never tell anybody that was on them ships that they would sink.

Marcello: So during a weekend, then, almost all the battleships would be in there.

Korba: Not all of them. There would always be a group out, and there would be a group in. It was very seldom that they were all in together.

Marcello: I guess that's what I've never quite figured out because if you went out on a Monday and came in on a Friday, when would that second group have gone out? On that Friday?

Korba: Well, some of them would have been...they would have cleared the harbor before the other ones would have come in. Every once in awhile, they would all be in together.

Marcello: So we were talking about the training routine awhile ago. Is it safe to say it was a routine?

Korba: Right.

Marcello: It was constant, however.

Korba: Right. That's right.

Marcello: How much emphasis was given to antiaircraft training?

Korba: Well, I think very little, very little.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that the planes would pull the sleeves, and you would perhaps fire at them?

Korba: That's right. We'd fire all day, and we wouldn't get anywhere near them.

Marcello: At the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, where was your battle station?

Korba: My battle station was down below. I was an electrician at that time. That morning I was up at four o'clock in the morning because I had the four to eight watch. I was relieved about

seven-thirty. He finished breakfast, and he relieved me at seven-thirty, so I could go up and eat. I was in the process... I just got through cutting in the port crane. I figured they were going to hoist in some boats. The fellow that was running the port crane was Andy Pinko from Binghamton. I talked to him, and I says, "I'll see you up at breakfast, and then we'll go ashore." He says, "Okay. As soon as I get through cutting this crane in, I'll see you up there." They were lifting some boats up out of the water on the port side. I was the last one to talk to him because we got hit there, and he got killed in that room down there.

Marcello: So where would your battle station be then? Where was it?

Korba: My battle station was up forward. I was in a repair party.

Marcello: Forward repair party.

Korba: Forward repair party. When I got to the mess hall, they sounded the alarm for fire and rescue. They sounded the fire and rescue drill, and I was in my working clothes, and this was Sunday morning. My fire and rescue station was up on the quarterdeck. I said, "I can't go up there like that." I was going to get some clothes on and get my hat on and all. I couldn't go on the quarterdeck out of uniform. That would be the end of me.

So about that time I got my shorts on. We wore our white shorts out there. I got my white shorts on and my hat and was going up there. No sooner I got on the quarterdeck than

everybody was running around. There was chaos up there, and about that time we got hit a couple of times on the port side --torpedoes.

**Marcello:** Let's just stop there because I have some more general questions I want to ask before I get to that point. As one gets closer and closer to December 7, and as conditions between the two countries continued to get worse, could you even in your position detect any changes in the training routine of the West Virginia?

**Korba:** Not really. We knew that something was going to happen. Really, just before all this happened, we had a great, big party on the ship. We had all the Japanese dignitaries and everything on there. Being an electrician, we had to put all these Japanese lanterns around. They had a party on the fantail.

**Marcello:** How long before Pearl Harbor did this take place?

**Korba:** Oh, I would say...let's see...December...it was probably in June or July or August--sometime in there. I know that we had to get all different colored lights up there, and at that time in the Navy, nobody had different colored lights, and we used to have to dye our light bulbs. We had all these dyes down there. I'll never forget that because it was after we got through dying all these light bulbs...we'd just dip them in like Easter eggs, and then they'd come out, and we'd let them dry. That's what we used.

I had all of this dye, and the guy told me, "Why don't you take this down to the storeroom?" The storeroom was down

about five decks, and you had to go down a straight trunk down, and for every deck there was another hatch, and you had to open it and go down again. I was carrying all this stuff, and I was sliding down this ladder. I missed one of them hatches, and I fell down about three decks. All this damn dye and everything busted, and it was all different colors. I was on the bottom of this, and all this stuff is dripping on me. You never seen...and I was hurting. They wouldn't have found me for days probably on that damn thing. Finally, I got myself together, and I got back up, and I said, "Oh, my God, look at this!" That whole trunk was covered with this dye and everything.

I got back to the shop. They said, "What the hell happened to you?" I says, "I fell down the ladder." So they had everybody down there cleaning up because the next day was inspection.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, did you seem to be having more general quarters drills or anything of this nature? Did that pick up at all?

Korba: No, I don't think so because once we went to sea...everyday that we went to sea, we went to sea for training. We had lectures, and we all went to battle stations, and they'd train all the guns. We had different exercises. They'd get some of the ships on the horizon, and they'd be training the guns at them and all. Then they'd be shooting at each other.

They'd be shooting at the wakes so many yards astern of the ship, and they would be observing the ship until a couple of them got pretty close. Then they'd quit everything (chuckle).

Marcello: How about your liberty routine? Did it vary any as one gets closer and closer to December 7?

Korba: No.

Marcello: How did the liberty routine work for you aboard the West Virginia?

Korba: I think we were in three sections. We got two out of three.

Marcello: When you say you got two out of three, what do you mean by that?

Korba: Well, every third day...you got two liberties, and then you had a duty--two liberties and a duty.

Marcello: So on a weekend, could you possibly have off both a Saturday and a Sunday?

Korba: Right. Every so often you'd get that.

Marcello: Could you stay ashore overnight?

Korba: No, not unless you was married or you went to Camp Andrews. That's the only time.

Marcello: Do you know why the Navy had that policy?

Korba: Yes, because Honolulu was so small it couldn't handle them.

Marcello: And there weren't very many hotels in Honolulu, were there?

Korba: No, there weren't. And the economy couldn't handle it at all. If you turned all these sailors loose out there...there was nothing out there before the fleet went out there--nothing. There was just a little two-lane road from Honolulu to Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: When you went ashore, what did you do? What was your liberty routine?

Korba: Oh, we used to go down to Waikiki. Before the war, most of the time, we would go down there, and we'd hang around the YMCA or the bowling alley. We'd go down to the pineapple factory. There wasn't too much going on.

Marcello: What does the Black Cat Cafe mean to you? Do you recall that place?

Korba: No, because the West Virginia used to hang out in Woo Fat's.

Marcello: The reason I brought up the Black Cat Cafe is because I think it was right across from the YMCA, and it was usually the first bar, I think, that a great many people stopped in.

Korba: All the ships had their own favorite bars, and if you was off one of the competing ships, you never went there.

Marcello: What was the attraction at Woo Fat's for the West Virginia?

Korba: I don't know. It was a good place to eat. It was a real nice restaurant, and there was no rowdy stuff going on in there. Most of the guys, when they got drunk...we used to go down to the Marine Barracks, and you could buy a quart of beer down there for, I think, 20¢. We did that when we went to the ball games and all.

If every once in awhile they'd let us tie up at the pier in the Navy Yard. That was pretty rare. That was a big honor. That was saved for the Pennsylvania. She was the flagship. But when they let us tie up there, that was the cleanest ship

in the Navy--when they were tied up to Ten-Ten (1010) Dock-- because the only time that you got off the ship was when you emptied the garbage can. Anybody who had a garbage can on the ship, they'd treasure it because that was your ticket to get off.

Marcello: And I guess when you were over at Ten-Ten Dock, you didn't have to worry about getting aboard a liberty launch and that sort of thing to get ashore, did you?

Korba: No. Everybody went ashore at Ten-Ten Dock. Like I say, as soon as it got dark, they'd all want to empty the ship's garbage cans. That was their ticket to get off the ship. They'd all stack...it was funny because they'd get loaded and want to go back, and somebody would steal their garbage can. They'd have a hell of a...they'd have to find somebody else's garbage can to carry back.

Marcello: What was the attraction of Hotel Street?

Korba: Oh, there was a lot of cat houses down there--Canal Street and Hotel Street. But the Navy, I think, did a bang-up job for the number of personnel they had there and all. They kept everything pretty much in line.

Marcello: I understand there were also quite a few tattoo parlors and things like that down there.

Korba: Right. I don't have any. I never could afford them, really. But on the West Virginia, that used to be a big attraction. The guys would get drunk, and they'd all get tattooed. Then



they'd get infected, and, boy, they looked terrible.

Marcello: That was a court martial offense, too, was it not, if you lost time on the job and so on?

Korba: Right. That's right. But at that time, you know, they could say how strict the Navy was, but everybody looked out for one another--the old-timers, you know. Then if the new recruits were giving them too much trouble, they ended up in Shanghai. They'd send them to the China Station. They got rid of them.

Marcello: How heavy was drinking around that time, that is, in Honolulu when you went on liberty and so on?

Korba: Well, like all of us, we were only eighteen or nineteen years old, and the only time we really drank--the fellows in my group --is when we went to the Marine Barracks. We didn't have any money. Nobody had any money. That's how they controlled everything.

Marcello: As the conditions between the two countries continued to get worse, did you and your buddies ever sit around in bull sessions and perhaps contemplate the possibility of something happening at Pearl Harbor?

Korba: Never. And everybody used to always say, "We can lick them Japs with the mess cooks we have. We wouldn't even send the fleet. We'll just send the mess cooks out there and beat them." They were good sailors. But, you know, the Japanese had just as many problems as we did with their Navy. They were still fighting with the big bullets and everything, or they would

have never have brought all that big stuff with them. They was actually a drag...it was really a Godsend that the ships ...if they were in Lahaina Roads--the ships--that water is deep out there. They would have never found them.

Marcello: And that was where the anchorage used to be at one time.

Korba: Used to be. That's right--Lahaina Roads, right off of Maui.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that weekend of December 7. What did you do that Saturday? Do you recall what you did Saturday, December 6, 1941?

Korba: I had the duty.

Marcello: That's right. You did mention awhile ago that you had the duty.

Korba: I had the duty.

Marcello: When did your duty start that day?

Korba: Eight o'clock that Saturday morning.

Marcello: Is there always a Saturday morning inspection? Or was there one that Saturday?

Korba: I think there was. I had the duty Friday, so I was there from Friday...now whether we had inspection, I really don't recall, but we usually had a Saturday morning inspection.

Marcello: When did you actually go to your particular station to perform whatever duties you had to do that day? In other words, were you on there all day?

Korba: Saturday?

Marcello: Yes.

Korba: That was the day before Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Yes.

Korba: Yes. I stood my watches. Well, on a Saturday after inspection, all we'd do was hang out down in the shop or go sun-bathing. Just hang around the ship. I had the four to eight o'clock watch that afternoon and the four to eight watch in the morning. That was my job.

Marcello: Did anything eventful happen that evening that you recall?

Korba: Nothing.

Marcello: Pretty routine,

Korba: The fellows that were ashore were gone, and the rest of them weren't doing nothing. We'd sit around and play cards. I used to hang out in the print shop down there. We had all kinds of linograph machines and all. They used to do their own cooking and everything down there. We were getting ready to mail all of our Christmas packages off. We had bought all these gifts to send back. We never got them off.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that Sunday morning of December 7, 1941, and you were mentioning awhile ago that you had been relieved around seven-fifty-five.

Korba: Seven-thirty.

Marcello: Seven-thirty. Let's pick up the story again at that point, and I'll let you carry the ball.

Korba: At seven-thirty I was relieved off on the after switchboard. I just got through talking to Andy Pinko down there in the crane room, and I was going to meet him up there for breakfast

as soon as he could secure the crane. When I got up to the mess hall, I was just sitting down there, and I was looking to see what I could eat for breakfast when they sounded the fire and rescue party.

So I was on my way getting myself together to go to my fire and rescue station, which was up on the quarterdeck up under the number three turret. As soon as I got up there... we got hit a couple of times on the way up there--torpedoes right under the compartment I was in. I was up on the second deck.

Marcello: Describe what it felt like when those torpedoes slammed into the West Virginia.

Korba: Well, the West Virginia was a pretty big ship. It had heaved a little bit. I thought some ship had run into us. About that time, when I got up there, the pilots were up there, and their job was to get them airplanes off the damn catapults. I don't know how they were going to do it, you know, sitting there.

Anyway, the planes they came real low--real low--right over the ship there. Our pilots were yelling, "It's the Japs! Sound General Quarters! It's the Japs!" You could see the big red "meatballs" on them. They'd come diving in on us.

Marcello: How low would you say those planes were?

Korba: Oh, man, they just cleared the tops of them ships because

them masts are up there quite high. They just cleared them. I could see them planes just as plain as can be. On a torpedo plane, they come pretty low.

Then they sounded General Quarters, and I went down to my GQ station, which was on the third deck in the forward damage control locker party. That compartment, usually on the damage control party, I don't think it had more than twenty-five or thirty people under normal conditions, but when I got down there, that place was full--packed--with all these sailors down there. What it was, these were the fellows that were going down into the magazines, the turrets, and get the ammunition. They couldn't go because they were flooded.

Marcello: The flooding had already started?

Korba: Right. As soon as I got down there, we got hit again, and we lost all power. It was dark down there.

Marcello: What was the reaction at that point?

Korba: Well, you know, on the old battleships, they used to have battery power. I used to take care of the batteries. So whenever you lost the load, automatically all your lights would come on. They had separate circuits where the batteries would take over. They'd last probably eight to twelve hours--just batteries.

But as soon as we got hit and the batteries didn't come on, I knew. I said, "The battery locker is flooded, and that's down below on the next deck." They said, "Well, this

ship isn't going to sink. They can't sink this ship." Well, the water was coming up there, and we were standing in oil and water, and this was on the third deck already. But we couldn't get out of there.

Marcello: Why was that?

Korba: Because the overhead of the third deck was an armored deck. It's about five inches of steel. And the ship was rolled over on its side a little bit, and the counterweights were wrong. You couldn't open the hatch from underneath--push it up--so we were trapped down there.

Marcello: Was there any panic?

Korba: Oh, no. There was nothing to panic about because we were just packed in there like sardines. We were just helping each other out. We were saying, "Don't worry. They'll get us out of here." I said, "They can't sink the West Virginia. There ain't no way in the world they can sink this thing because we have so many blisters and all." But eventually, somebody got word, and they opened the hatch. We had no communications or anything.

Marcello: Phones were dead, too, were they not?

Korba: Everything. With all the confusion that day, I don't think they ever manned the phones or anything. I think the only reason why the West Virginia didn't roll over was that inboard the blisters got locked, and they held her in position until she settled flat. That would be my theory.

Everything happened so fast. We got hit with six torpedoes. No ship could take six torpedoes on one side. The reason why the West Virginia took six torpedoes on one side, and the bombs, is that the Japs didn't know it was sunk. They didn't know it was sitting on the bottom. She was sitting on the bottom. She was sitting there, and they kept pounding her. They were trying to get rid of the thing, and they couldn't sink it anymore because she was sitting on the bottom.

Marcello: To which side was the West Virginia listing?

Korba: To port. We didn't catch nothing on our starboard side.

Marcello: You were outboard of the Tennessee.

Korba: Right. That's right. And our blisters got locked up. Another thing that didn't help too much is that I think when they knocked the holes in it, the armor plates just slid off--the 16-inch armor on it.

But then eventually, after we got out of that compartment ...we crawled out of that hold down there on the third deck. Well, the second deck was just a blazing inferno. There was no air down there. Everybody was crapping out because there was no oxygen in that air. So we were on our hands and knees going up forward.

I remember getting up to the second deck hatch...I had one more to go, and I crapped out. I don't remember another thing. Then when I came to, I was on Ford Island. Now how I got off of that ship--and we were outboard--I don't know. I don't

remember a thing.

Marcello: Now by the time the West Virginia started to take on water, was that water mixing with oil and so on?

Korba: Yes, it was more oil than water.

Marcello: Did that make it hard to move from one deck to another?

Korba: It was. We were covered with oil. And the water was pretty deep down there. You know, we only had shorts on. That's what we wore there--the uniform-of-the-day.

Marcello: When you finally got that hatch open and you proceeded from the third deck to the second deck, was this procedure taking place in a generally orderly manner?

Korba: It really was. There wasn't any panic at all down there because everybody was waiting their turn to get up this one ladder. There were some people up top that were pulling us up the ladder because there was just one flight. Like I say, it was an armored deck hatch. There was no scuttle in it. You had to open the whole damn thing to get out of there.

Marcello: Do you recall any fumes of any sort while you were down there?

Korba: Oh, yes, yes.

Marcello: Describe what they were like.

Korba: It was just like being in an oil tank, really. That black oil really gets in your lungs. You can't breath. I remember we got on a beach down there. After we came to, we got out of this building, and we were eating grass trying to quick get something in our throats so we could throw it up. Like a dog



does. But it didn't affect anybody. Hell, they took us in there, and they had everybody tagged like cordwood. We had tags on us as to what ship they took us off.

Marcello: Obviously, you can't remember this, but I'll ask anyhow. From the time General Quarter sounded, or from the time the first torpedoes slammed into the West Virginia, until you went out, approximately how much time elapsed.

Korba: When I came to and we were sitting on the beach there, I remember the Nevada was coming up the channel.

Marcello: Do you remember seeing that?

Korba: Yes.

Marcello: Describe that action.

Korba: The ship had a lot of smoke coming out of her stack and steam coming out of there, and she was going down. Everybody was yelling at her to get the hell out of the channel because all of the ships behind her tried to get around her. She was so damn big that everybody was scared she was going to sink in the channel. If she got stuck in the channel, all the ships would have to go around the other way to get out. There was only a circle around the island. I remember seeing that. She was going, and I saw her run up on the bank. Now what time that was, I have no idea.

Marcello: Okay, you come to and you're over on Ford Island. What happens at that point?

Korba: Well, like I say, after I came to, all of the fellows off of

the West Virginia were in the building, too. It was like a patio inside this building. I think it was the sickbay or something. Anyway, we were all on cots, and they had us all tagged as to what ships they took us off. As soon as we came to, the corpsman would say, "How do you feel?" I said, "I feel pretty good." He said, "If you're able, get up." We got up by ourselves, and we got out of there. All we had was our skivvies on by then.

Marcello: And I assume you're covered with oil and grease and everything.

Korba: Oh, yes, yes. So we went out there, and we cleaned ourselves up, and then we got some clothes. There was some little houses on Ford Island--officers' quarters--and they went in there and got some clothes for us. They had dresses and shirts--anything--to put on because we didn't have any clothes at all ...and shoes.

Then that night...then they gave us all this ammunition and guns and everything. They said, "Go down there, and we're going to protect the airfield." How the hell were we going to do that with .30-06's?

Marcello: Did you just have Springfield rifles--the .30-06's?

Korba: Yes, that's it--.30-06's. Then we had all this ammunition and everything. So we went down there, but we hadn't eaten that day. We didn't get no lunch. Then they start building fires, and they had some meat. They were going to barbeque all this meat. All the survivors that were real able to,

they were on the other side of Ford Island. So as soon as we found out that, I said, "Where's the rest of the West Virginia crew?" They said, "They're on the other side." So we all went down there, and we got together--the fellows I met there--and we went over there to them. We had like a reunion there. By that time it was starting to get dark, and they had to put the fires out. Hell, they were eating the raw meat. They just threw it on the fire and took it off, and they were eating it.

Then they said that they were going to evacuate the island, so we got on the ferry boat. They used to have a ferry that ran between the mainland and Ford Island, so we all got on that ferry boat that night. He worked across the island down there, and we got in the Bloch Center.

Marcello: Were any of the ships still blazing and so on while you were going from the island on that ferry boat?

Korba: Oh, yes. Pearl Harbor had about six inches of oil over the whole thing. It was just one big lake of oil. The Arizona, I'll never forget it. That thing was cherry red. The whole ship was cherry red. That thing burned...it must have burned for a week after that. The whole mast was like this, and it was just cherry red--the whole ship.

Marcello: What were your thoughts when you saw that?

Korba: I couldn't believe it, really. All them ships were spotless, and there they are--sitting in the muck.

Marcello: Up until that time, what had you been doing? In other words, you came to over on Ford Island, and then you mentioned what you did that evening. What did you do between the time that you came to and the time that you went out to guard the airstrip that evening?

Korba: We were sitting around on the airstrip waiting around for them to come back. They were talking about that there was going to be an invasion or something...what the Army was doing and everything.

Marcello: What kind of rumors did you hear?

Korba: Well, we heard that they were landing. When I was eighteen years old, I never figured out what this was all about because they didn't have any news media like they have now. What did we know? We listened to the radio and the disc jockeys out in Honolulu. Other than that, the news wasn't much. They had no news on the ship.

Marcello: Considering what happened that day, is it safe to say that you believed all the rumors that you heard regardless of how preposterous they may appear now?

Korba: Well, I don't think so. Looking back, as an eighteen-year-old, you hear all of this stuff. I didn't believe it. I said, "If they come in here, they'll take it." I figured we were pretty unprepared, really.

Marcello: Did you hear very much gunfire that night from trigger-happy individuals?

Korba: Oh, yes. Once we got over to the Bloch Recreation Center where we spent the night...by that time they had machine gun nests all over. Anything that would move...they were shooting at the planes that were taking off from Hickam Field. They would just clear the sugar cane field, and them guys in them nests would fill them full of holes when they went through there.

Marcello: Do you recall the planes off of the Enterprise that came in that evening?

Korba: Yes.

Marcello: Describe that.

Korba: Well, that evening they were coming in, and they even passed the word that there was planes coming in. But, boy, they let loose. All the ships in the harbor cut loose.

Marcello: Where were you when that took place?

Korba: At Bloch Recreation Center.

Marcello: Describe what it looked like.

Korba: The sky was covered. They were all yelling, and they knew better. But, boy, them guys let nothing come in.

Marcello: When you went over to Bloch Arena, what were you doing over there? Anything?

Korba: Nothing. They were trying to...they were mustering us, and there were rumors saying we were all going back to put the South Dakota into commission. They're going to keep the crew together. They're just going to leave them ships sit

there and get new ones.

Marcello: What did you talk about that night?

Korba: Well, what we were mostly concerned about was that there was no food or anything there. It was pretty hard to get all these sailors fed, and we had no clothes. We had nothing. The only thing we had was what we had on. Everybody had guns. They had two or three or four guns--all they could carry. They gave them everything they could give. They finally got us together, and they gave us a towel, a toothbrush, some shoes, a white hat, a shirt, and a pair of pants so that we'd all look alike so they could identify us.

Then the next day we went to work on the Nevada because I think she brought the turkeys back for the fleet for Christmas. We were on a working party. The only reason everybody volunteered to go on there was to get something to eat. We worked on the Nevada while she was over there in that sugar cane field. We worked all day on that thing until night--loading the barge--and then we came back. We got something to eat on the ship. They gave us a sandwich or something that night.

Marcello: When did you get a chance to visit the West Virginia again or to see it again?

Korba: Oh, it must have been...oh, about a year later. About a year later. I was on a destroyer, and she came in there. I talked to the captain, and he says, "Yeah, you can go over there."

So I went back into the Navy Yard and found out where they were running the shuttle boats, and I went aboard there. What a mess. The only reason why they even spent all that money and time and manpower and everything on restoring those ships was just to save face. They still had a ship that was built in 1923. They didn't improve it any. They added all the tonnage on, and she couldn't do fifteen knots even if they had tugs pulling her. They didn't improve her or anything.

Marcello: When did you pick up that destroyer?

Korba: Oh, about the third day, I think it was. I think it was the tenth of December. We got the word that the ships were coming in. All the ships were out of oil and everything, and they were coming in. We went down there and looked at them. They wanted volunteers. So we went down there--me and my buddies. There were about four or five of us. We went down there and sat on the dock and watched the destroyers come in there. The destroyer I went on only had one stack on her. She was one of the newer ones of that whole group.

Marcello: Which destroyer was it?

Korba: The Patterson--392. We watched them come in, and I said, "I think I'll take this one here coming in." So I went down there, and I talked to the quarterdeck and told him I was a survivor off the West Virginia, and I said, "I want to volunteer. I'm an electrician. I'm a striker." He says, "Well, wait awhile." So the guy went up and saw the executive and said, "We got a

volunteer here who wants to come aboard for duty. He's off the West Virginia." He says, "Well, go back over to the West Virginia desk over at the Bloch Recreation Center and tell them where you're going so they'll keep track of you." So I went back there and said, "I'm going to the Patterson. Assign me to the Patterson. I'm going there." So I reported aboard. They logged me in and everything. Then they sent me down to the lucky bag. That's where I got my clothes. Everybody, all the guys on the crew and everything, all donated a pair of pants, underwear, and everything. Hell, we went to sea about three days later. We were gone for ten days.

Marcello: Where did you go?

Korba: We went out to the Solomons. We went to Canton. Oh, we were gone all the time. We ran the pants off of that ship. They were going to use that ship at...what was it...Wake Island? They were going to run it up on the beach. They were going to use it for an artillery piece. The day before we were supposed to make the landing in there and do all this to save the Marines...it was Midway or one of them islands.

Marcello: I think it was Wake.

Korba: Wake. The carrier sent out a couple of scout planes, and they found the whole Japanese Navy there. Man, we high-tailed it out of there so fast. The Saratoga picked up a torpedo on her way back. It was just outside of Pearl. She picked



up a "fish." It was just getting dark, and they saw smoke on the horizon, and they sent a couple of destroyers to see what the smoke was. While the ships were on the horizon looking where the smoke was coming from, a submarine snuck up on the Saratoga and put a "fish" in her. And she said to stand by, that she'd been torpedoed. Hell, that thing took off. Nobody could catch her. None of the destroyers could catch her.

Marcello: Did you spend the rest of the war in the Pacific?

Korba: Right.

Marcello: And were you on the Patterson the whole time?

Korba: Oh, no. I only stayed on the Patterson about nineteen or twenty months. I left her in Australia. We were assigned to the ANZAC force down there.

I came back, and I got new construction. I got a sea-going tug. I stayed with her about a little over a year. Then she got back into the Pacific. Then I got transferred to...they were building APD's--the underwater demolition ships--so I went on that. Then I finished the war on her.

Marcello: Well, that's probably a pretty good place to end this interview, Mr. Korba. I want to thank you very much for having taken time to talk with me. You've said a lot of very interesting and important things, and I'm sure that historians and scholars and students are going to find your comments most valuable.

Korba: Thank you.