

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. James Leavelle

Date of Interview: December 7, 2017

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Interviewer: Ed Metzler

Mr. Metzler: This is Ed Metzler. Today is December 7, 2017. I'm interviewing Mr. Jim Leavelle. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center of Pacific War Studies Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the Preservation of Historical Information related to this site. So Jim, thank you for spending the time to share your experiences with us, and I'd like to get it started by having you give us your full name, and place and date of birth, and we'll take it from there.

Mr. Leavelle: My full name is James R. Leavelle, and I was born in Red River County, Texas, in a little town called Detroit. I graduated from school there in '39.

Mr. Metzler: What was your date of birth?

Mr. Leavelle: Date of birth is August 23, 1920.

Mr. Metzler: 1920. So that is going to make you 97 years old.

Mr. Leavelle: Correct.

Mr. Metzler: That's--congratulations to you, sir. Okay, so did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Leavelle: I had brothers, no sisters.

Mr. Metzler: And were you the youngest?

Mr. Leavelle: Next to the last.

Mr. Metzler: How many brothers?

Mr. Leavelle: Six total; there's five brothers. There's six of us total.

Mr. Metzler: Were you born on a farm, in town?

Mr. Leavelle: I was born on a farm, on a kitchen table.

Mr. Metzler: (Laughs). How about that? So, your dad was a farmer?

Mr. Leavelle: Right.

Mr. Metzler: Did he own a farm?

Mr. Leavelle: I think he rented it, probably.

Mr. Metzler: What kind of things were you guys raising back in those days?

Mr. Leavelle: Back in those days, you raised cotton, corn, and different grains and so forth.

Mr. Metzler: How long before they had you out working on the farm?

Mr. Leavelle: Well, I started pretty early; about when I was 10 or 11 years old, I was holding my own in the fields.

Mr. Metzler: (Laughs). It's a little different than that today, isn't it?

Mr. Leavelle: Right.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, boy! So, you went to school there locally?

Mr. Leavelle: Well, I started in a little country school. I think it had, the school had two rooms to it, and we probably had about 12 or 15 students. That went all the way from first grade up to seventh grade, and you had probably a total of students, the most was probably about 15.

Mr. Metzler: So, the country schoolhouse that we've all heard about, that's where you went?

Mr. Leavelle: Exactly. I think there was three in my class, starting class.

Mr. Metzler: Were you top of your class, or bottom, or what?

Mr. Leavelle: Well, I really don't remember whether I was or not. I think there was two girls and myself and another boy, a total of four of us.

Mr. Metzler: Well, you didn't have a football team, did you? You didn't have enough people.

Mr. Metzler: So, if you were born in 1920, you probably graduated from high school when you were 17 or 18, something like that?

Mr. Leavelle: That would have been the case, if I had got to go to school regularly; but in 1937, President Roosevelt had initiated the Civilian Conservation Corps, and you had to be 17 years old to join it. Well, I was in my next to senior year there in school, but I

wanted to go in the CCC, so I did. I signed up and went; I spent a year with them. Then I came back and got back in time for the December class in school.

Mr. Metzler: So what was that, 1930--?

Mr. Leavelle: Well, actually it started in '38 and went into '39. Then I finished my high school and looked around for something to do and there wasn't anything to do. I think I was 18 years old then, and I didn't find anything, so I decided to join the Navy. I had a relative, my sister-in-law's brother was in the Navy and had been for a good while. He came to visit when he'd take vacations, to stay with us. So I decided well, Will seems to be doing pretty good in the Navy; he'd been in several years. So I signed up in December and then I got to go to my first school in San Diego in January of 1940.

Mr. Metzler: Was that boot camp?

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah.

Mr. Metzler: So that's early 1940. At that point, there's no war for the U.S., so it's peacetime Navy.

Mr. Leavelle: And the force was stationed along the coast of California. But the Japanese was raising a little stink along about that time, and just about the time, shortly after we graduated from our school, he transferred the whole thing to Hawaii, all the ships out there.

Mr. Metzler: The fleet, yeah.

Mr. Leavelle: The fleet went out there, and we ended up out there also. We made several trips hither and yon. I first was on a destroyer, the USS Hammond, 412, it was a brand new destroyer. I was on it for about four or five months. We escorted the flattops around, air carriers around the country. They had just about every slot filled on that, and they had openings on the destroyer tender, the Whitney, so I got transferred. I don't know what month that was, that I went over there. I went over and went into the storekeeping bit (unclear) and that's what I was doing when the attack came on.

I was still there. In the meantime, we made several trips out through the South Pacific and other places. In one of those South Pacific deals, we got caught in that big storm that lasted a whole week.

Mr. Metzler: Was that before or after the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Leavelle: Before. I was going from the top deck with something in my hands and arms; during that storm, those waves were running well over 100 feet high. Like I said, cooks couldn't cook. They could make coffee; I don't know how, but that's the only thing. (Mr. Metzler laughs). For one whole week, we ate nothing but bologna sandwiches three times a day.

Mr. Metzler: And plenty of coffee (laughs).

Mr. Leavelle: Plenty of coffee, yeah. I started to go down a ramp there when one of those waves hit. They told me later it was well over 100 feet high. It rocked that ship, and I, with that stuff in my hands, I was thrown over the railing and I dropped about 15 feet or maybe a little better and hit that steel deck down there on both knees. In five or ten minutes, both knees were bigger than watermelons.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, my Lord!

Mr. Leavelle: I couldn't walk, and so of course, they put me in the sick bay. The ship's doctor started working on me. In the meantime, we came back into Pearl, so when--I don't know how much time elapsed--after the attack there by the Japanese. The doctor had me up and walking fairly well, but I was still having trouble. I still have them today; that's the reason I'm in this chair today. So after they attacked, I went to my battle station after they blew the deal on that.

Mr. Metzler: What was your battle station on the Whitney?

Mr. Leavelle: I was the loader on the five-inch gun. We only had one on there, and it was on the front. They had a barrel about 30 feet long, I think, something like that. When you fired it--we didn't fire it

because it was geared to shoot 35 or 40 miles, so if we had fired it from up there, it would have killed somebody over in Honolulu somewhere (Mr. Metzler laughs). But so I loaded it, but like I say, we never did fire it. Our three-inch anti-aircraft guns that we had mounted on the top all got to shooting. I don't think they hit anything, but they fired a lot of shells, anyway. But the doctor, under the circumstances, he counseled me on the problem I had, and he said, "I don't think I've got the equipment and everything to tend to you like you need to be done." He said, "I'm going to send you back to the states and let them treat you back there." I was after the attack, so I went back to the states, and I ended up at a convalescent hospital; the Navy had taken over a country club down close to San Bernardino, California and made a hospital out of it. When I went in there, they didn't have many--they had a full quota of doctors and a full quota of nurses, and they had probably 15 or 20 patients. They hadn't gotten many patients in there, but they were coming in daily. I got to know everybody there, being it was just a few, naturally. I stayed there several months. They got me up to where I was getting around fine, no problem.

Mr. Metzler: So you didn't have to use a cane or anything?

Mr. Leavelle: No, I was getting around without a cane or anything else. So then I started jumping the doctor every once in a while, asking about letting me go back to sea., He'd pick up a folder there and look at it, and he said, "No, you're not ready to go yet," and lay it back down. Well, that went on for two or three months, me hitting him up nearly every week. Finally he just told me; he said, "I'm not ever going to authorize you to go back to sea." Well, of course, that floored me real good.

Mr. Metzler: Why would he say that, I wonder?

Mr. Leavelle: I'm coming to that.

Mr. Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Leavelle: He told me; he said, "The reason is, I don't believe those knees are going to stand up." He says, "I think they're going to break down on you, and I'm not going to put you out on a ship where you might be on a battleship or something, and you get into a battle and you've got a job to do and those knees break down. That takes one man out and probably takes another man out to take care of you. So I'm leaving two places blank where they need somebody if you're in a battle out there." He says, "I'm not going to put another ship in that predicament."

Mr. Metzler: Makes sense.

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah, it did. That's what was bad about it; it did make sense.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, darn it.

Mr. Leavelle: So, he said, "I'll send you to shore duty." I said, "Well, I don't want shore duty." So anyway, that went on for a little while. Finally, the Navy air force came to my rescue. They were having trouble getting parts for those planes, even from Germany. They'd break something over there, and they'd know they had it here in the states, but they didn't know whether it was in Dallas or New York or out on the west coast, or wherever it was. So they decided they're going to build one huge warehouse that had every part that they needed. So if they broke one, they could call and there would be one on the way to them the next day. But what they didn't take into consideration on a huge deal like that was the employees there, in that time of war, because so many people had joined the service. Well the man in charge of that, he came over to the hospital and talked to my head doctor. He said, told him what his dilemma was. He said, "Would you happen to have any servicemen here that's got a lot of experience handling supplies and things?" And what does he do? He sic's him on me. (Mr. Metzler laughs.) Of course, he came and told me what his dilemma was, and at that time, I was making \$38.00 a month. He

found out how long I had been doing, nearly two years, supplies and everything, and I'd be handling some of the same stuff that he'd be using. So he told me, he said, "If you will take your discharge and come to work for me as a civilian employee," he said, "I can start you at \$150.00 a month,"

Mr. Metzler: That's a heck of a raise!

Mr. Leavelle: Well, like I say, I'm not too damn good with arithmetic, but I could figure that out pretty quick. So I said, "Well, I'll give it some thought." But in the meantime, before all this had happened, while I was sweating and everything about what I'm going to do, they didn't have beer there at the hospital and so I decided to get-- Corona sent some buses over there, about two a day at different times, it wasn't too far out from there. There was just a few stores there, not much of a city, but I thought, well I'll go over and get me a beer and I went over there. When I got off the bus, the first beer joint I come to, I went in and sat down, and who should be sitting at the bar but one of the nurses and one of the corpsmen. They had been dating--well, I knew both of them real well, and so we talked a while and I got my beer and started sipping on it, and then he told me. He said, "Jim, I'm going to--they tell me they're going to ship me out here pretty soon." I said, "God, I wish I was going with you." So we talked, and finally he said, "If I get shipped out, will you take care of my girlfriend while I'm gone?" I said, "Well sure, I'll do that." Only fair thing to do, so I said, "Sure, I'll do that." We shook hands on it, and I said, "You know, when a Texan shakes hands, that's like a contract. (Unclear) that's fine." So we shook hands, and sure enough, he got sent out, and so I started seeing this nurse. Of course, she wasn't supposed to see either one of us, because she's an officer and we're peons. So anyway, she and I got along. She didn't have any money and no car, and neither did I, so there wasn't much to do, except they

had a good lake there and they had a half a dozen or so rowboats on it. We'd go down there and get out in the evening, just row around the lake, and talk and so forth. When I got this offer, she knew about it, and I told her a little bit later, we were walking up from the lake one day and I told her, I said, "Do you know what?" I said, "I think I'm going to take a discharge and go to work for them people, and if I don't like it, I come from a little town called Detroit, Texas, down in east Texas." I said, of course, I had told her about it, about where I had lived and raised up. We were walking along, and I said, "I think I'm going to take a discharge and go to work for the air force and if I don't like it, I'll quit and go back to Texas and see what I can find there." I asked her, I said, "Would you be interested in seeing Detroit, Texas?" She took about two steps and said, "Yeah, I believe I would."

Mr. Metzler: And the rest is history, huh? (Laughs.)

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah, the rest is history. So I went ahead and took my discharge and went to work for them over there.

Mr. Metzler: Was the war still on at this point?

Mr. Leavelle: No, it hadn't even started at this point.

Mr. Metzler: Ah, okay.

Mr. Leavelle: It hadn't even started at that point. So, she of course, being a nurse, she went to work the next day at the nearest hospital, so no problem for her. It wasn't a problem for me, either, because they put me right to work. I worked on it for about a year, and then I got--California Electric Power offered me a job up in the Sierra Mountains for more money. Of course, she and I both liked the mountains, so I took it and we went up there. I made just about a year there; I think a little bit shy of it when that doctor's predictions came down. My knees buckled on me, and the closest hospital, the veterans' hospital, was over in Arizona. So I told the people I was working for, I said, "Well, I think I haven't been back

home since I had left,” and I told them; I said, “Well, when I get out of the hospital, I think I’ll go back to Texas.” Of course, when I went into the hospital why, the hospital hired her the next day to go to work for them. So everything was easy for us, and I put a little time in there. When I got out, we came back to Texas and then after visiting the folks, we came to Dallas and I had a couple of different jobs.

Mr. Metzler: Now, what year would this be?

Mr. Leavelle: Oh, it’d be about the mid-40s. So we, like I said, she was able to work, so we didn’t hurt for anything. I finally took a job with the Federal government as an auditor, and I worked for them for a year or two when I saw an ad in the paper for the Dallas Morning News for police officers. So I decided, well I’m—I’d always thought I’d like that. And the odd thing about it, I got to thinking about it later, the young man in my graduating class, he was the one that rolled up the future deal of all of our people in the graduating class. Some of them were going to be doing this and some were going to be doing that, and I didn’t notice it until I’d been with the police department for about three months. I happened to think what they had said I’d be doing ten years down the road. I’d be a police detective for a big city police department.

Mr. Metzler: I’ll be darned!

Mr. Leavelle: (Laughs).

Mr. Metzler: So, somebody had real foresight there. Could we go back to your time on the Whitney?

Mr. Leavelle: Well, I’m coming to--oh, okay, go ahead.

Mr. Metzler: What did--the Whitney was a destroyer--?

Mr. Leavelle: Tender.

Mr. Metzler: Tender, so--

Mr. Leavelle: What we did was carry supplies for destroyers. We carried like-- people would ask me what--and I said, "We furnished them everything from torpedoes to toilet paper."

Mr. Metzler: And fuel and goods?

Mr. Leavelle: Fuel, if they needed that, and any other goods. If they wanted beef or run short of beef, we had many quarters of beef hanging in our freezer in the bottom, and they'd pull alongside, and if they wanted one shoulder, one quarter or other, my job was to go down there and check them out. Of course, they'd send somebody over to pick it up. They'd take it over--because they'd come right up to us and tie up with us. They'd just walk from one ship to the other with the food, and that's the way we supplied them, any food they wanted. Usually about once a year, or maybe twice a year, they'd have to have more supplies, the regular things you'd have: flour, and all this crap, so they would pull alongside, and we'd have a loading party. Then we might spend three or four hours doling stuff out. Of course, all I was doing then was just checking. They'd tell me how many pounds they wanted of this, or so forth, and I was just keeping track of how much they got. Of course, as you can probably guess, those people had a pretty good hand in figuring out just about how much food it would take to run the six months or so.

Mr. Metzler: Was the Whitney based in Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Leavelle: We were, you know, so were they. So was everybody else. The President sent them out there; we was all based out there.

Mr. Metzler: Would the Whitney go out to them or would they come in to Pearl Harbor and you guys would--?

Mr. Leavelle: Well, usually, we would trail; sometimes we would trail them. It would depend on where they were going. Before the war started, they didn't have a thing that they had to go to, so they'd just decide where they wanted to go. Of course, we would usually, maybe one

or two of them would go together and we might fall behind them; we'd just trail them, where they went. Other times, we might drop off on our own, but they'd know where we were, and if anybody there ran short, they could radio us, and we'd go to them and supply them.

Mr. Metzler: So, on that famous day, December 7th, where was the Whitney and you?

Mr. Leavelle: We were anchored in a spot northeast of Ford Island. I didn't find out 'til last year just how we were. I always wondered how far from Ford we were.

Mr. Metzler: I've got a photo here, taken in October of '41, and that's Ford Island.

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah. I'm thinking I'm right out in here somewhere.

Mr. Metzler: Now that's battleship row, right there.

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah, well last year, when we was over there, my granddaughter, she's a hustler. I told her I've been wanting to find out where my ship was. These, I guess, represent ships here.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, those are ships of some sort. Again, this was before the attack. This was October 30th.

Mr. Leavelle: Well, let's see. We could be one of these, right there.

Mr. Metzler: You could be, yeah.

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah, one of those, right there. We had four destroyers tied up by us.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah?

Mr. Leavelle: One of them had his guns tore down, so they didn't fire a lick all that time because they couldn't put them up quick enough. The others unlimbered theirs, but--

Mr. Metzler: So you were aboard ship when the attack was.

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me what happened.

Mr. Leavelle: Well, all right. On that morning--you were never in the Navy, were you?

Mr. Metzler: No, sir.

Mr. Leavelle: Okay. When the Navy does anything, they have a system set up for it. All right: I'd say about March of 1941, the deal with Japan got kind of serious, and we started going on the alert. We'd go on the alert and maybe be there for a week or two weeks, and then they'd kick it off. Then something would happen, and they'd put us on alert. That'd mean we couldn't go ashore or anything if you happened to be anchored, lucky enough to be anchored in there. Then they'd take it off; it'd be off for a week or so, and then it'd come on again. Then, as it turned out, the day it happened, we were not on alert. We'd been off of it for over a week, so we were about as living casual again. It being on Sunday, the Navy has a strict rule, as they do on most things. If you wanted to go on liberty, liberty didn't start until eight o'clock in the morning. That meant eight sharp, not ten minutes to eight or anything. When the clock struck eight, the coxswain of that boat that was taking them to the shore would crank up and he'd be ready to load you, and you'd get down and they'd take you over to the shore. Then you could catch a bus to wherever you wanted to go. So that was our predicament. By that time, I was able to get up. The doctor had me to where I could get up and walk around pretty good, but I still used the crutches half the time. I went out for breakfast and I was standing there on a railing, looking out on Ford Island. Let's see, (unclear). Where I was doing it, let's just say this one right here.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, that one's tied up to another ship. That might be your ship.

Mr. Leavelle: So, I had walked out on deck, and was looking up across here like this.

Mr. Metzler: Across to Ford Island.

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah, well just looking up through there. A boatswain's mate came out and he was standing there on the railing with me, talking to me. The first ship, the first deal out from Japan--

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, the aircraft.

Mr. Leavelle: The leader, the leader. He come in and he came right down this canal here; that's our way of getting in, like that. They come right down that, and when he's right along in here somewhere, the boatswain's mate said, "Look at that plane. He's got a red ball under his wing." He said, "They must be using that for target practice or something." But just about two seconds later, he released those bombs and of course, all these ships tied up here, he just strung them out down there like that. Then he said, "Aw, hell! That's a Japanese plane!" So he turned around and, of course, all the ships, they have phones scattered around on them, so that if something happens and they need to contact, they can pick up a phone, a supervisor can pick up a phone and make a notation that goes all over the ship. Everybody can hear it. So he grabbed that and blew the battle station deal for them. And that was about three or four minutes to eight. Of course, as I told you, they didn't let that boat leave for shore until strict eight. So some of them standing down there waiting to get on the shore boat started cussing. "Well, it's a hell of a time to pull (unclear) right here!" But he blew that thing twice, to go to your battle station, and then he announced it over this deal, and then he told them, he says, "And this is no bullshit, either!" So everybody headed for their battle stations. My battle station was up on the forward end, and where I was, I didn't have too far to hobble.

Mr. Metzler: So you were hobbling at that point but hobbling fast.

Mr. Leavelle: Oh, yeah, still. Well, I thought I was, and I got to my--I loaded, I loaded up, but we didn't fire it, because like I say, it's a five-inch deal and it's good for shooting 30 or 40 miles.

Mr. Metzler: It's not anti-aircraft type thing.

Mr. Leavelle: No, no. It's sea battle with other ships is what it is. Of course, we had three of those other deals up on top. The men had those out and shooting at them. All of a sudden, we had four destroyers tied up to us, and one of them had their guns all tore down, cleaning and everything, and they was completely out of it. The other three ships, they put their guns in the deal and I could hear them. Well some of them, I could see them from where we were, firing.

Mr. Metzler: Did they pull away from the Whitey when the attack started?

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah, they started unhooking right away. So while some of them was unhooking and doing all of that necessary stuff, the ones on the guns was trying to fire. They got loose; the first run was all over before any of them could get untangled and ready to go.

Mr. Metzler: That's when you know there's some serious damage being done, I guess, because the Arizona went up on the first wave, I think.

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah, it did. It wasn't in the early part in the raid. Id say if you strung it out like this, it wasn't quite halfway down when they dropped on it.

Mr. Metzler: So what's going through your mind when all of this is happening? I mean, you must realize this is--

Mr. Leavelle: I know what's going through it, because it's been drilled into us for weeks and weeks, what was happening. Of course, as sailors, we all talked about what we would do if something happened, and then, shit, you can't do any of that when (unclear, both talking together).

Mr. Metzler: When it actually happens.

Mr. Leavelle: When it actually happened. But anyway, we had a view and my granddaughter, she arranged for this admiral, his boat and his captain and lieutenant, to take me out to where my ship was tied up, because they're numbered, and he had a map with everything numbered on it. I always thought I was one and a half or two miles

out, so when he got out, he said, “Well, let’s see.” He took his deal out and said, “You were exactly a mile and a half from here.”

Mr. Metzler: From battleship row to where you were back--?

Mr. Leavelle: They were measuring it from Ford Island.

Mr. Metzler: From Ford Island, yeah.

Mr. Leavelle: It was a mile and a half.

Mr. Metzler: So you were almost to the shoreline over here, then.

Mr. Leavelle: We were much closer to the shoreline than anything else. And this mountain area back here, back them days, was all farmland and they grew sugar cane on it. In the fall, when the sugar cane got ready to be harvested, the farmers found out that they could--in the old days, they’d take knives, they’d go in there and strip the leaves off it. But they found out that they had a system, they could burn those leaves. So they’d set the stalks afire and they’d burn real bright. From where we were, it was just a sea of fire over on that. It was kind of pretty; we enjoyed watching it from the ship. Then it wasn’t long before they figured out how they could do something else and then they started selling all of that. Now it’s full of houses and stuff like that over there.

Mr. Metzler: After the attack occurred, the Whitney was not hit, and what did you guys do? Did you go up to try and rescue people?

Mr. Leavelle: No, no. It wasn’t feasible for us to depart our ship to go and help them, because we didn’t know where they were coming from and how many they had. We could see what was happening to them over here; we could see all of those ships getting hit, and you could see some of them go down. What bothered me, and it still bothers me to talk about it, is well, three of the men that I went through boot camp with, two of them was on one of those battleships, and one was on the other, the Oklahoma or something. I’ve forgotten now which ones they were on. When that went down and then I

could see bodies floating, I couldn't help but think about my friends.

Mr. Metzler: It might be him, yeah.

Mr. Leavelle: Well, it could have been, because neither one of them survived it.

Mr. Metzler: Is that right?

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah. But that's what went through my mind. I knew people on there, and I knew what they was going through. So that made it rougher for me, and when you see bodies floating around out there, and there's torpedoes ruptured the oil tanks underneath and that oil starts flowing out and it gets on top of the water, about a half inch or better, and then something sparks, sets it afire, you've got a forest—well, a fire burning out there. It takes in--they looked like logs to me, from what I've seen down in the east Texas area where we used to cut trees and cut logs into them and roll them into the river, and float them down the river to a good place pull them out and put them on trucks and take them to be cut up.

Mr. Metzler: Sawmill, yeah.

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah. So that's what the bodies reminded me of, but I knew they wasn't logs. I knew what they were, and it bothered me, and it still--I have to talk about it. I still see my two friends floating there, is what I see. So, that's what we did. Of course, the next day, we--another thing that went through everybody's head, what happens after an air raid like that? What usually happens after that? It's a ground invasion, and so we stayed awake all night--

Mr. Metzler: Figuring that they'd be coming ashore.

Mr. Leavelle: That's exactly, so we stayed awake and everything. Even some of the people, like those people on top of my ship there, they could undo those machine guns that's up there, and I guess some, they came out of storage on some of the bigger ships, but they took them and put them out here on the bank, outside, and cleared it, so

there wasn't nothing in there between them, so they'd have, when they come down, if they'd come in there, why they could--

Mr. Metzler: Have a clean shot.

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah, they'd have a clean shot at them. I'll tell you another story about that in a little bit, but anyway, that's what we did all night. Of course, we let some of them, they put me back to bed, let me go lay down, but some of the others, they worked in shifts, go to bed for an hour or two and then get up and let somebody else go to bed. That's what we did, exchange deal during the night and waiting for the next day. Then of course, we had full scale--of course all of our destroyers had undone themselves by daylight the next day and moved out, so we pulled up and went back over here and pulled in. I think the first one we come to--

Mr. Metzler: Pulled into where, now?

Mr. Leavelle: One of those ships that had been hit.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, on battleship row, then?

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah, yeah. Pulled up beside them and found out what they needed. We had supplies for these, and it didn't make any difference whether it was a battleship or a destroyer, whatever. If they needed it and we had it--

Mr. Metzler: You probably had it, yeah.

Mr. Leavelle: (Unclear). It was, well, the ship was named after a city in Missouri.

Mr. Metzler: Well, there was the St. Louis, and let's see, what other--?

Mr. Leavelle: There was another one from Missouri.

Mr. Metzler: There was, yeah, I didn't bring that list with me, of the cruisers.

Mr. Leavelle: Cruisers, yeah. I forget, but anyway, it was one from Missouri. That was the first one we come to, and of course, the biggest problem they was having with those, first went out, it knocked all their power out. It was out of power. We had a lot of power, so we strung lines over to them and then they went to work, and when

they got their lines going, we could unhook and pull up to somebody else and do the same thing, or whatever they needed, whatever they needed most. Of course, naturally, if they needed food stuff, why we would give them that. So that's what we did for the next few days, just worked with the--

Mr. Metzler: It was lucky you were there, to be able to help.

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah. Well, we had some others over here. There was two or three others.

Mr. Metzler: Tenders?

Mr. Leavelle: Tenders here, and happened to be in there, and so they did the same. One of them was tied up way over here somewhere. I don't know if it shows a picture of it or not, but he's way over here somewhere. But anyway, that's what we tenders did. We started helping out the people that were injured, the ships that needed help.

Mr. Metzler: Let's see, one of the battleships, and I think it was the Oklahoma, she capsized, just turned completely upside down.

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah, well, she never did go--they finally got her up to move it, but she sank between there, before she got to the states.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, they were towing her, I think in forty--I don't remember what year.

Mr. Leavelle: Year later or years later.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Leavelle: Well, the Nevada was tied up over here on this far side, and we could see it. All the captains, even ours, had orders to get out of that deal if anything happened. I mean to get the ships out of the harbor.

Mr. Metzler: Out into the open ocean.

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah. And so that's what everybody was trying to do. The Nevada, they undone and backed out and started, and of course, was going down this, coming over to this canal.

Mr. Metzler: Kind of the straits that go, yeah.

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah. It was kind of a beautiful sight. They had all their guns going while they were in motion. Well, one of the destroyers did the same thing. They fired, but the Nevada was on fire, on the back side, but their firemen was fighting that while their gunnies was gunning in. They spotted him and circled over him, and the captain was smart enough to know what they was thinking. They was waiting for him to get into this channel, and then they was going to pound on him and block that channel.

Mr. Metzler: That's exactly what they wanted to do, yep.

Mr. Leavelle: So he just turned it and run it into the bank.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, he just beached it, if you will.

Mr. Leavelle: That's right. A real smart thing to do.

Mr. Metzler: Yep. Absolutely.

Mr. Leavelle: Because if they were able, they would have put it back into service.

Mr. Metzler: Mm-hmm. And it didn't block the channel.

Mr. Leavelle: No. Yeah, that's the big thing.

Mr. Metzler: That's the most important thing, yeah.

Mr. Leavelle: One of the destroyers, and I think he finally got out, I don't know which one it was, but he went out, did the same thing. We could see him, and his back gunners on the fantail area, they were firing full blast. (Chuckles) You're supposed to go in and out of there at about four or five knots, because you kick up too big a wave. I bet he was making 15-20!

Mr. Metzler: (Chuckles) Or 20, yeah.

Mr. Leavelle: When he went out of there.

Mr. Metzler: Pedal to the metal, huh?

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah, because those waves were going way out. But anyway, that's what we did. When we settled down, my ship's doctor told me, he said, "I don't have the facilities or the stuff to treat you like you needed to be treated," Well, my knees began to give me a lot

of trouble with all the activity I was going through, so he said, “I’m going to send you to the states and let them work on you.” So that’s what happened.

Mr. Metzler: How long were you on the Whitney after the attack before the doctor sent you stateside? I mean just a few weeks.

Mr. Leavelle: Two weeks.

Mr. Metzler: Couple of weeks.

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah, probably a little less. I believe it was the next three or four days afterward. We didn’t get to transfer out right away; we had to wait ‘til one of the ships were going out.

Mr. Metzler: So, do you still think about those days?

Mr. Leavelle: They come to me every once in a while. I try to keep them out of my mind, especially when it comes to watching those logs floating out there. So I have to give that up there.

Mr. Metzler: Did you stay in touch with any of your buddies after the war, or did you kind of get divided up?

Mr. Leavelle: No, the one or two that I did like, well there was two of them that I corresponded with, but the others I did not, so I don’t know what happened to them.

Mr. Metzler: So, what do you think about the Japanese?

Mr. Leavelle: Well, they’re pretty smart people for one thing. Nowadays, I try to give them the benefit of the doubt for what they’re doing. I’ve got some friends that are Japanese. I’ve got one that has a shop where he sells cameras and all this kind of stuff. I haven’t talked to him in a good while, because he moved his business somewhere it’s not handy for me to go by. But I used to go by there and buy stuff from him. I’d argue with him; I’d tell him, I’d say, “Now look. In World War II, I didn’t get to kill any Japs.” I said, “If you keep messing with me, I’m going to start here catching up!” (Mr. Metzler laughs).

Mr. Metzler: What did he say to that?

Mr. Leavelle: He said, "Well, I wasn't born in Japan." I said, "I don't give a shit whether you was or not." I said, "You're still Japanese." Of course, he takes it in good mood, without any--in fact of the business. They had a big bus that used to run from Dallas down to Shreveport, on race day, when that racing season is going on down there. They'd leave around six o'clock in the morning because the races didn't start 'til late and they'd get you down there before the races started, and then you'd come back. You paid a certain fee, and you went down and back. So I was over--of course, Japanese are great gamblers, all of them.

Mr. Metzler: Are they? Really?

Mr. Leavelle: Oh, yeah. They like to gamble. I told him; I said, "Well, I'm going to go down there to the races tomorrow." He said, "You are?" He said, "Well, wait a minute. I might have a deal for you." So he grabbed the phone and called his wife and told her--of course I knew her, too. He said, "Hey, Jim's going to the races tomorrow. Would you like to go?" Of course, she said, "Yeah, I'd like to go." He said, "Well, get your stuff ready. You know when you have to be over here." Then he started looking at the different deal, looking for bets to put down. What he would do is give her money for him to bet, and she could do whatever she wanted to. So then I heard him tell her, "Well, you need, how much money to make, well you'll need so much for something to eat." I spoke up; I said, "Look. If you're going to give her money to go with me, give her enough for me to eat." He said, "Well, if I furnish a wife, you ought to be able to furnish the money for the food." (Mr. Metzler laughs).

Mr. Metzler: Well, what else can you tell me about Pearl Harbor before we close this interview off?

Mr. Leavelle: Well, I've been back several times.

Mr. Metzler: I'll bet.

Mr. Leavelle: One of the times, in '06, I was over there to talk to the survivors, and they told me at that time, that they didn't--they was concerned about us dying off so fast. They didn't think they were going to have enough to hold a formal conference anymore. That particular year, it was handled by the United States Parks Department. They had searched Japan over real good, trying to find one of the pilots that was piloting that day. They only found one, and he wasn't very healthy. They said he was the only one still living. They brought him over.

Mr. Metzler: Did you meet him?

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah. They brought him and his wife over, but they brought over four or five others, but they were in other areas of the battle. After it was over with, of course he had somebody translating for him. I couldn't understand a lot that they were saying. Afterward, I made an appointment to talk to him, and I spent about 20 or 30 minutes with him, I guess, talking. Of course, his wife would translate for me, and that helped. Of course, she could speak very good English. He told me several things that surprised me. One of them was that they were hoping there would be some flattops in there. I asked him why; he said, "Well, we wanted to knock them out." He said, "Our people that knows that kind of stuff said the flattops was the only ships that we had that could overtake them before they got back to Japan." Our other ships wasn't fast enough, but the flattops were. Of course, I got to thinking later, they also realized that if you got within 100 miles of them, they would release those planes and let them go. I could see what he was talking about. There's something else that came out. Oh, I asked him--they had started their flight from about 200 miles out, almost 200 miles out--and I asked him, I said, "How come you launched your attack from nearly 200 miles out?" He said, "Because we did not have

enough fuel in our ships to get us back to Japan.” He said, “We had to start if from out there.”

Mr. Metzler: Wow! That’s something.

Mr. Leavelle: I found out several little things like that.

Mr. Metzler: That you don’t read in the history books.

Mr. Leavelle: Yeah.

Mr. Metzler: Well, I appreciate you spending the time today, Jim, to tell us what happened.

Mr. Leavelle: Well, I hope I done something that you can use.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, absolutely. Any time we can talk to a Pearl Harbor survivor, we get things we can use, and I appreciate your spending the time with me today. And thank you for what you did for our country. We do appreciate you.

Mr. Metzler: All right. Thank you.

OH04928 – James Leavelle

Transcribed by: Joel Keefer

Fredericksburg, TX

June 23, 2020