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Interview with  
A. G. Prochnow  
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Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello  
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Oral History Collection

Alex Prochnow

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: San Antonio, Texas

Date: August 24, 1974

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Alex Prochnow for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on August 24, 1974, in San Antonio, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Prochnow in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the minelayer USS Montgomery during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Prochnow, to begin this interview would you very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, would you tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Prochnow: Alright. I was born on a farm out here in Converse. It's a little farming community right in back of Randolph Field. In those days we didn't have hospitals to go to, so my mother bore me right there at the farmhouse. I attended school out at Converse, a little rural school,

and then finished my high school years in San Antonio at San Antonio Tech. Then I further went to school at a business college, and that was the extent of my schooling. In those days we just couldn't afford to go to universities. I was born in 1916, and this puts me right at fifty-seven years old right now.

Marcello: Now when did you enter the service?

Prochnow: I entered the service in a very peculiar way. There was about three of us fellows that met someone back in 1938 here in San Antonio, and they were interested in those days in a reserve unit of some kind. San Antonio in those days didn't know what a Naval Reserve unit was. So we encountered someone who said he would sponsor us-- an ex-Navy man, to be exact, who had been in the Navy at one time, and he was a signalman in communications, radio. So through contact with someone that knew him, there was about thirty-five of us that decided that we would do this on a voluntary basis. We became the first Naval Reserve volunteer unit in San Antonio. We met once a week up here at the quadrangle at Fort Sam Houston. They gave us one room, and we had a radio set in there, and we learned how to do the Morse code and whatnot. Some of us that didn't like radio had the signal flags for the communications. So once a week we'd come in

from out in the country, and we'd go through about a two-hour drill in communications. This was how I started. But in 1940 when the draft began, I was about the second person in Bexar County to be drafted into the regular service, and since I was in the Naval Reserve this put me straight up into the Navy right then and there. I was sent up to Chicago Signal School. This was when I began my real Navy career.

Marcello: In other words, you did not actually go through boot camp at that particular time?

Prochnow: No, sir, I sure didn't.

Marcello: Was this unusual or was this standard procedure?

Prochnow: No, I would say this was rather unusual because, as I say, we did not get paid for these drills. All that the Navy issued us was a uniform, and me being six-feet-three, I looked pretty silly in a Navy uniform. But that's how it was.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the Navy? Was it just something to do? Why did you decide to enter the Naval Reserve, I should say?

Prochnow: Well, it was really, I guess, wanting to do something other than to stay on the farm, where it looked like I was dedicated to be, because our folks were rather poor.

I always had a desire . . . as a kid growing up, I would read every western magazine and every sports magazine, and the Navy somehow appealed to me more than the Army did. I could always see myself sailing off somewhere.

Marcello: How long did you stay at this Navy Signal School in Chicago?

Prochnow: We stayed there about three months, and they never even gave us . . . this was about a year before 1941, before December 7, because things were beginning to look pretty serious, and they did not even give us any leave to go home. We went directly from Chicago. They shot us straight out to the Pacific to Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: In other words, again, you had not gone through boot camp at all. Did you ever go through boot camp?

Prochnow: Never went through boot caomp, what you would really call a boot camp.

Marcello: In other words, when you went aboard a ship you didn't know the front end from the back end. You didn't know the stern from the bow.

Prochnow: I knew only what we learned at the signal school in Chicago, which was based at the Yacht Club at Randolph Street near the yacht basin. You know, the Great

Lakes was up the line somewhere, and I never saw the Great Lakes. The only ship that we had was an old ship that was not even sea worthy anymore, the old Wilmette, and she was docked there . . . this was at the Naval Reserve unit there at the yacht basin. They would take us aboard ship and show us what the bow was, what the stern was, what the bridge was, and the entire part of a ship.

Marcello: How would you describe the training that you received there at the Signal School at Chicago? Was it thorough? Was it competent training?

Prochnow: Yes, I would say it was because I remember being real scared. Leaving San Antonio in real hot weather--this was in November of 1940--I really didn't expect it to be very cold up there. But I got off the train up there, and there was snow and ice, and I never froze so much in all my life. I couldn't believe it was so cold.

But nevertheless, you asked me about the training portion of it. There was an ensign there that was in charge, and he had given us strict orders, "Everything you have, you send it home. You have no further need for it." So lo and behold, after we all thought we had done that, they lined us up there in the armory, and then he asked the question of each one . . . he

went right down the line, "Did you send everything home?" I said, "Yes, I did, except for some pencils and some paper, stationery." He got so mad he told me to get down there and get that thing sent off! He wouldn't even let me keep some pencils and some stationery. That's how strict they were, even in those days.

But the school itself was strictly just like any other boot camp, you might say. We had to get up at five in the morning and get our teeth washed and breakfast, and then we had some drills, and then we went right into communications during the day.

Marcello: And generally speaking, you think that you did receive a thorough grounding in communications there.

Prochnow: I would think so because when we left there . . . we had entered as seamen second class, and when we left there we were qualified as a third class signalman or radioman. I happened to be a signalman. So we did get our first stripe then.

Marcello: Where did you go from this school in Chicago?

Prochnow: We went straight out to Treasure Island in San Francisco for assignment to a ship out in the Pacific.

Marcello: At the time that you entered the Navy on a regular basis, how closely were you keeping abreast with world affairs?



Prochnow: Not very much. I'll be honest with you. You see, I joined the Naval Reserve in 1938, and this was almost three years later that it really came to pass. Of course, I had been in the Navy about a year before Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: You said that from Chicago you went to Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay. Is this where you received your first assignment?

Prochnow: This was where I received the first assignment, right, which was to a receiving ship at Pearl Harbor, the Oglala, which was the mother ship of Mine Division One and Two.

Marcello: The Oglala was the ship which later on supposedly sank from fright during the Japanese attack.

Prochnow: Right.

Marcello: Okay, so you took the Oglala, then, from Treasure Island over to Honolulu.

Prochnow: Well, the Oglala was stationed at Pearl Harbor, but from San Francisco to Pearl Harbor I went over on the USS St. Louis, a cruiser.

Marcello: I see. And then from the St. Louis you went aboard the Oglala, which was nothing more than a receiving ship, like you said.

Prochnow: That is correct. This is correct.

Marcello: In other words, it was going to be another temporary assignment, and you would move from there to a permanent station.

Prochnow: That is correct.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of going to the Hawaiian Islands, especially after Chicago?

Prochnow: It appealed very much to me. It really did. This was part of my dream that I had looked forward to very much.

Marcello: Of course, it was one of the reasons that you had entered the Navy for in the first place.

Prochnow: This is true.

Marcello: You mentioned that you had wanted to travel.

Prochnow: Right.

Marcello: Okay, so how long did you stay aboard the Oglala?

Prochnow: Just about three days.

Marcello: And then from there did you go aboard the Montgomery?

Prochnow: I was assigned to the USS Montgomery.

Marcello: Describe what the Montgomery was like. What sort of a ship was it, and how were living conditions aboard it?

Prochnow: Well, my first look at the Montgomery was really one of surprise. When they had said a destroyer-minelayer, I expected a pretty ship. But when I first came aboard, it happened to be nothing but an old World War I four-stacker destroyer--what they referred to as a

four-stacker. She had been converted to a minelayer. The Pacific Fleet only had two divisions of eight ships--four in each division. And just the Montgomery was in Division One, along with the Gamble, the Breese, and the Ramsey.

Marcello: What were living conditions like aboard the Montgomery?

Prochnow: Well, I was assigned to the forward part of the ship. Consequently, it was the roughest part of the ship. I was prone to be, which I found out, the one that would get seasick pretty easy. I didn't like it a bit because I was . . . that ship was just like a cork on water. It would just bounce all over the place! Whenever we'd go to sea, the first two days was just real rough on me because I would be seasick. But after that, I would be okay. But the first two days on that ship was murder.

Marcello: What sort of function did this ship have? You mentioned that it was a destroyer-minelayer. What sort of functions did it have in that capacity?

Prochnow: Well, the idea for a minelayer, of course, was that in case of war that this type of craft would then be assigned to the laying of mines in waters where eventually some enemy might approach.

Marcello: What sort of armament did a ship of this nature have aboard?

Prochnow: The armament, as I recall, was very light. I couldn't believe this later on, but once the war started we only had one .50-caliber machine gun on each side. Then we had a bigger gun, and I can't ever remember the size of it. I want to say a four-inch gun. Then we had some pom-pom guns on the midships on either side. I think they called them 40-millimeter pom-poms. Then, of course, we had our mine tracks which was on either side of the back side of the ship.

Marcello: These were called mine tracks?

Prochnow: These were mine tracks where we kept . . . at least about twenty mines would lay on each track.

Marcello: Now when was it that you went aboard the Montgomery?

Prochnow: This was in about . . . this was about June of 1940.

Marcello: In other words, you were on there well over a year before the actual attack on Pearl Harbor.

Prochnow: About seven months.

Marcello: Well, from June of 1940 to June of 1941 would be a year.

Prochnow: That's right. No, it was not June either. It was in November of 1940.

Marcello: So this was about a year before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Prochnow: Right, just about a year that I was out at Pearl, right.

Marcello: I do know that as conditions or relations got worse between the United States and Japan, the fleet would,

of course, be engaged in regular and periodic maneuvers. Did the Montgomery participate in these maneuvers that were carried on by the Pacific Fleet?

Prochnow: Oh, yes, we were always on a maneuver. We had maneuvers with many of the larger aircraft carriers.

Marcello: Oh, you were generally with the aircraft carriers?

Prochnow: With the Enterprise, Saratoga, and the Lexington. Then many times we engaged in--like all the ships did--target practice on some of the outlying islands there around Hawaii.

Marcello: Under normal circumstances, how often would these maneuvers occur?

Prochnow: Well, I would say--I can't remember exactly, but I'd say--it was almost on a . . . we were doing something every week somewhere.

Marcello: In other words, when you went out on these maneuvers, would you stay out for a week at a time?

Prochnow: Oh, yes. Sometimes even more.

Marcello: Sometimes for as long as two weeks?

Prochnow: Oh, yes. Very definitely.

Marcello: Would it ever be longer than two weeks?

Prochnow: Well, the longest time I was ever on a ship was three months, but it wasn't prior to the war. That came afterwards. But we were out as much as four or five weeks.

Marcello: In other words, would the aircraft carriers and so on usually stay out longer than, let's say, the battleships and things of this nature?

Prochnow: Oh, yes, very definitely. These smaller ships just didn't have the fuel or the food capacity to carry them that long.

Marcello: When you say these smaller ships, you mean the battleships as compared to the aircraft carriers?

Prochnow: Well, I was comparing, like, the Montgomery compared to the battleships or the larger-type cruisers and carriers.

Marcello: But you yourself did stay out for more than two weeks at a time.

Prochnow: Oh, yes. We sure did.

Marcello: Did this routine change any as one gets closer to Pearl Harbor, that is, the actual attack on Pearl Harbor?

Prochnow: Well, let me say this. Usually, we would try to be back in port on weekends. For most of our week our engagements or maneuvers did start, say, like on a Monday and take us through that Friday or Saturday.

Marcello: I see. What you're saying, then, is that if you stayed out more than a week at a time, this was . . . it was unusual. This was an exception rather than the rule.

Prochnow: Right, yes. Mostly, it was on a weekly basis.

Marcello: How did your liberty routine operate when you were in port?

Prochnow: Well, I'll tell you. I was raised up to be a church-going kid. What we would do--another fellow and myself--we eventually always ended up going to church on Sunday morning whenever we could. We kept our civilian clothes. In those days you were allowed to have civilian clothes. I had sent home for my clothes, and I kept them at the downtown YMCA. What we would generally do, if we were going to church . . . we would feel better going to church in civilian clothes than we would in a Navy suit. This was generally part of our weekend routine--to try to go to church.

Marcello: How often would you have liberty?

Prochnow: Oh, we had . . . well, maybe we'd be the duty maybe one out of four. That weekend we could not go ashore. There would, I think, be one weekend out of every four that we had to be duty-bound and could not go ashore.

Marcello: And usually, I gather, when you went ashore you had to be back aboard that ship at twelve o'clock that night. Was that your standard procedure also?

Prochnow: In most cases it was, right.

Marcello: What else would you do when you went ashore? What did you do for entertainment, or, you know, what sort of social life did you undertake?

Prochnow: Well, believe it or not, by going to church, we met some . . . I guess you'd call them old maids. These ladies, they loved to entertain service personnel. They had this house out at Waikiki Beach. They invited us out there one time. Then after that it seemed like they liked our company. They would ask us back again whenever we had the chance. Every chance that I could get, we'd be back at their place because it was an exceptionally nice place right there on Waikiki Beach. There was swimming, fishing, whatever we wanted to do. It was just very delightful.

Marcello: Generally speaking, when most of your shipmates came back off liberty on a Saturday evening, what would be their condition?

Prochnow: They'd be very sad, I'll tell you. I just couldn't believe that these kids would drink and carouse as much as they did. But eventually, military life in those days was just easy-going. Tattoo parlors and bars and girls, they were everywhere.

Marcello: I think you're referring basically to Hotel Street, are you not?

Prochnow: Yes (chuckle).

Marcello: I think there was a great deal of activity down on Hotel Street.

Prochnow: There were quite a few bars down there.



Marcello: And from what I gather, on a weekend there were wall-to-wall bodies down on Hotel Street. In other words, the sailors overflowed into the streets.

Prochnow: This is true. It was just wave after wave of white hats.

Marcello: When was payday during that period?

Prochnow: I think we got paid once a month. It was very small pay at that. Of course, we had . . . all we really had to buy was just a few personal incidentals. The rest went just for foolishness, or you'd send it back home.

Marcello: Now you mentioned awhile ago that you usually had one in four liberty. Did this mean that on a weekend that perhaps half the crew would be able to get off that ship?

Prochnow: More than half would get off the ship. I'd say more like three-fourths of the ship would be off.

Marcello: In other words, you had four duty sections. One duty section would have to remain aboard, and there would be a standby section, and then there would be two liberty sections.

Prochnow: Right, correct.

Marcello: And this procedure continued right up until Pearl Harbor, also, that is, the attack.

Prochnow: Right.

Marcello: Now did you ever get the entire weekend off, or was it simply either a Saturday or the Sunday?

Prochnow: As I recall, I had very few total weekends off. It was mostly a twelve o'clock curfew.

Marcello: Now how safe did you feel--how secure did you feel--being at Pearl Harbor.

Prochnow: Well, most of the time I felt pretty secure because when you looked around you and you saw a lot of big battleships and big cruisers . . . and generally where we were moored it was on the west side of Ford Island, and, of course, we were always in full sight of all of the Navy ships--the aircraft . . . the Navy . . . what do you call it? The Navy Air Corps, a portion of it, was at Ford Island. It felt pretty secure, I'd say.

Marcello: Where did you tie up with relation to Battleship Row?

Prochnow: We were just on the opposite side of Battleship Row. We were on the west side of Ford Island.

Marcello: In other words, did you have a clear view of the battleships from where you were?

Prochnow: Oh, yes, very much so. We were tied up at what they called Pearl City Landing.

Marcello: Now normally, when you went on maneuvers, did you usually go out with the aircraft carriers? You mentioned that

you did awhile ago, but the question I want to ask now is whether or not you ever went out with the battleships?

Prochnow: Oh, yes, we sure did.

Marcello: What did you normally go out with, the aircraft carriers or the battleships?

Prochnow: Well, sometimes we would be out with a whole task force of battleships, cruisers, carriers--the whole works. But a lot of times we would be just our own Mine Division One and Two. We'd be doing what we were really being trained for to do, that is, to lay mines.

Marcello: How would you describe the morale of that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy?

Prochnow: Well, I'd say it was rather easy-going. We had a skipper who was from Mississippi, and I know he picked on me because I was bigger than he was. I was the tallest guy on the ship. He would kind of ride me at times because I looked pretty goofy in that uniform (chuckle).

Marcello: What would be the complement of a ship like the Montgomery? How many men would be aboard it?

Prochnow: We had roughly 140 men.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind?

Prochnow: Well, I used to think they were pretty nice because right there at the landing, when we'd go on liberty, there used

to be a little snack shop which was run by Japanese people. We used to think that they were pretty nice people. They were there just like anybody else. They had a little private enterprise-thing going for them. All the sailors would, you know, buy their hotdogs, cold drinks, sandwiches, coffee--whatever--either going or coming from liberty. We thought they were pretty nice people, but later on we found out they weren't so nice.

Marcello: Did you and your buddies in any of your bull sessions ever talk about the possibility of war between the United States and Japan? Did you ever give it much thought?

Prochnow: I personally never did, no.

Marcello: Okay, I think this more or less brings us up to those days immediately prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. What I want you to do at this point is to describe to me in as much detail as you can remember what you did on that Saturday, December 6, 1941. Then from that point we'll move into Sunday, December 7, 1941. But let's start first of all with Saturday.

Prochnow: As I recall, on Saturday I was . . . I had the duty on Saturday. I couldn't even leave the ship. I knew that I had . . . I think that I had remembered that I had

traded off with someone because I wanted to go to church on Sunday morning. So I really had the duty on Saturday.

Marcello: What sort of duty would you have had on a Saturday?

Prochnow: Up on the bridge, the signal bridge.

Marcello: What sort of work did you as a signalman do aboard the Montgomery?

Prochnow: Well, in port, generally, we had two ways of communicating. One, of course, was by signal flags, and the other one was by signal lights. So that Saturday, while I had the duty, I had unfortunately taken . . . part of my workload to do while being on my four-hour shift as signalman was to air bunting. Now to air bunting means that there are two sets of flags--sixty-six flags in each box, so to speak, on each side of the bridge--and I had taken all of those 132 flags out. I was supposed to take them out for airing because during maneuvers or while being out at sea, they have a tendency to get wet. So we had to what we always called "air the bunting." So I had two big piles of signal flags lying there on the deck that were supposed to be aired out. This is what I was doing on Saturday, and it was still there on Saturday night, and so they were still there Sunday morning.

Marcello: What time did you go to bed Saturday night?

Prochnow: I don't quite remember what time I went to bed. I just don't remember what time I went to bed.

Marcello: Can you recall anything out of the extraordinary that happened on that particular Saturday night? In other words, were there the usual number of drunks coming in, or were there an unusual number of drunks coming in, or were there as many as usual?

Prochnow: It really wasn't any different from any other weekend that I can remember. But I now do recall that on that weekend, especially when we came into port late Friday, and then again Saturday when I had the duty, that I had never seen as many ships in that harbor. Never had I seen that many ships at one time! I think a few of us made the comment, "What is going on? Why are so many ships in the harbor this weekend?" It was just unbelievably full! This is one thing that I do remember.

Marcello: Okay, so you got up on . . . well, I'll let you pick up the story. Let me ask you this. Did you go to bed at a reasonably early hour that Saturday night?

Prochnow: Yes, I would say I did.

Marcello: Okay, this, I think, moves us into Sunday morning, then, and once more I'll ask you to describe your experiences on that Sunday morning.

Prochnow: Well, anyway, as was my custom when I had a chance to go to church, this is what I had intended that morning. We were sitting down below decks at the coffee table waiting for the first liberty boat which was at the eight o'clock time. That was the first time that we could even go ashore that Sunday morning. So we were sitting around this coffee table drinking coffee. All of a sudden the boatswain's mate came running down, and he hollered out like, "Somebody's bombing us! Somebody's shooting at us!" For a few seconds we just, you know, just looked at him, you know, like, "Well, maybe." But then we could hear something, you know, explosions. Since we were sitting right along at the water level below decks, we could hear these explosions going on. Then by the time, of course, we started going topside and looking over towards Battleship Row. There was nothing but just clouds of black smoke coming up.

Marcello: Now what ships were moored around you? Were you with the other destroyer-minelayers, or were you around with a bunch of destroyers?

Prochnow: Our ship was tied up in a nest with the other three minelayers. There were four ships in our nest.

Marcello: In other words, those four ships weren't exactly the most inviting target around. The Japanese had bigger game in mind.

Prochnow: Very definitely. Now next to us was the Curtiss, which was a seaplane tender. Next to it was another larger ship which was the Medusa. The Medusa was a repair ship. Those were the other two big ships next to us.

Marcello: Okay, pick up the story from this point.

Prochnow: So immediately, of course, general quarters was sounded. We only had very few people aboard ship. I think we only had about two officers out of the eight or the ten that we generally had aboard ship. The general quarters was sounded, and we all went to our immediate stations.

Marcello: Where was your battle station?

Prochnow: My station, of course, was up on the bridge. All I could see was two big piles of flags that were supposed to have been in their respective places, and they weren't. So everybody--chaos, of course--was pretty much there. So the first thing that I remember doing was trying to get those flags back in their respective places.

Marcello: In the meantime, what were your immediate emotions or thoughts?

Prochnow: My immediate emotions, I'd have to say, was when I saw that first Jap come over and saw that big red ball under there. It wasn't until then that I really realized that it was a real bombing--when I saw that Japanese plane going over.



Marcello: How low were these planes coming in?

Prochnow: Well, the first wave, of course, was the torpedo bombers. After they left Battleship Row, they just took off over our little nest of ships. They weren't very high up, I'll tell you.

Marcello: Could you actually distinguish the pilots of these planes?

Prochnow: We could see the pilot and everything. We sure could.

Marcello: What did they look like?

Prochnow: Well, I'd say they looked pretty weird, you know. Of course, with goggles on in those days . . . they weren't enclosed as much as the ships are today.

Marcello: They were basically open cockpits, in other words.

Prochnow: Open, this is true, and you could pretty much visually see these pilots.

The skipper finally made it back. He had been over in Honolulu for the weekend. He came back rather early, and . . . from Pearl City to Honolulu was about fifteen miles. So he came back from Honolulu, of course. He was one of the first officers back. The others kept drifting in, but I can recall that when he came up on that bridge, every Jap plane that would go by, he'd shake his fist at them. He was from Mississippi, and he'd cuss them. I mean he would cuss them! It was funny, and then it wasn't so funny because looking over

at Battleship Row, you know, which was burning and in flames and smoking, it was just plain a mess.

Marcello: What sort of resistance was the Montgomery able to put up? You mentioned that you didn't have very much armament aboard.

Prochnow: We didn't. We finally managed to get the one .50-caliber machine gun going on the starboard side of the ship. Since we were tied up with three other ships, it was pretty difficult to shoot at something without hitting the next ship over. In fact, the point of our halyards that we take these flags up on, they were shot up by one of our neighboring ships. Anyway, our firing wasn't very responsive, I'll say that much.

Marcello: Immediately after word had been passed that the Japanese were attacking, how would you describe the reaction of the crew? Was it one of panic? Perplexity? Confusion? Professionalism? How would you describe the reaction?

Prochnow: Well, I would say that certainly panic had to set in right at the very beginning. It took some doing to get everybody settled down to what they were supposed to be doing. Just like myself, after finally getting those flags put back where they were . . . we were short-handed and didn't have the personnel enough to really go to sea.

In the meantime, they were trying to get steam up so we could get out of the harbor with a nucleus crew, if nothing else. I finally found myself back on the aft part of the ship assigned something I had never done in my life, and that was to help out with the depth charges. See, we also had depth charges on our ship. From being a signalman--being trained for signalman--but not having enough people to take care of it, I was finally assigned to the aft part of the ship to help with the depth charges.

Marcello: Well, during the actual attack itself, what were you doing up on the bridge?

Prochnow: Putting the flags back in for one thing. The next thing we received was a signal that a midget submarine was in the harbor which the Breese had picked up. The Breese was the outside ship. Somehow, she saw the conning tower of this midget submarine heading straight in our direction, which was in the direction of the Curtiss and our nest of four ships. When this signal came about, this was extra excitement. On top of just aircraft, all of the sudden here was an enemy submarine in the harbor. Not being very familiar with a midget submarine, some of us had visions of a big submarine, you know. Of course, the word submarine itself just scared everybody again all over.

Just about that time the USS Monaghan, which had had the weekend duty to be on what you call "On Ready" duty, with full steam was coming around the bend of Ford Island. She got the signal that here was this midget submarine. That skipper did nothing else but try to ram the dickens out of it. Of course, they were so close in . . . and I don't know whether they ever shot at it or not, but I do know that he tried to ram it. In doing so, he ended up hitting part of the harbor there. He finally backed out and went on up the channel and out of Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: When you say he hit the harbor, you mean he hit one of the docks or piers or actually ran aground?

Prochnow: Yes, part of the docks. So anyway, they got loose and they went on out. In the meantime, somebody else was-- I think it was the Curtiss that started--shooting at this submarine. It finally disintegrated. Now whether it was the Monaghan that got this, I don't know.

Marcello: But you were an eye-witness to this?

Prochnow: We were an eye-witness to this submarine being blown up, right.

Marcello: About how far were you from this action?

Prochnow: It was about 400 yards, I'd say. But I do remember everybody just screaming with delight when they saw this thing being hit.

Marcello: Now did this occur during the first attack or during the second attack?

Prochnow: I would say this was right after the first wave. Yes, I think it was.

Marcello: Am I safe in assuming that the Montgomery did not come under any direct attack during this period that we're talking about now?

Prochnow: The Montgomery did not come under any direct attack, as I recall. One of the Jap planes that was shot down by someone else landed right off of our bow of the ship. No more than seventy-five feet out, this Japanese plane hit the water and crashed. The Japanese pilot . . . everybody was pointing at this Japanese pilot trying to crawl out of his ship while it was sinking. So our liberty boat, which had been going between Pearl City landing dock and our ship carrying back these personnel coming back from Honolulu . . . this guy's name was "Cowboy" Cawkins. We always referred to him as "Cowboy" Cawkins because he was a wiry little fellow. He always ran the liberty boat. When he saw this Japanese plane hit the water, he went over there in his whale boat, and along about that time this Jap was pulling out a pistol. Old "Cowboy" pulled his out first, and he let him have it

right between the eyes! As this Japanese was going down in the water, "Cowboy" just reached over and got his helmet which had come off of this guy's head. Old "Cowboy" wore that helmet all over the South Pacific. That was his pride and joy because he had killed one of the first Japs (chuckle).

Marcello: And you were able to witness all of this.

Prochnow: Oh, yes, we were able to witness all of this going on.

Marcello: Were you still up on the bridge at this time?

Prochnow: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Then all of this must have occurred basically during the first attack or sometime around then.

Prochnow: Yes, right, this was all right at the first attack.

Marcello: Okay, so then during the second attack you were back on the after part of the ship actually performing some of the minelaying functions, or at least you were . . .

Prochnow: We were preparing to get underway. As we were getting more and more people back from Honolulu--that were coming back--I guess the skipper finally decided that we had enough people to pull out, although we weren't fully equipped with all the personnel we should have had. It was just a matter of wanting to get out of the harbor, period. All of our ships were trying to get out and get underway.

So being on the aft part of the ship there with the depth charges, as we went out I can remember going out the channel. We had visions of more submarines by that time being in the harbor. We went out the harbor. Going up the channel itself and out to sea, we were dropping depth charges coming and going. At times it actually looked like the back part of our ship was being raised out of the water because we were dropping them so close in. The other ships were doing likewise--the Breese, the Gamble, and the Ramsey.

Marcello: I may have missed this point, so I'll ask you again. Did you get up steam and get out before the actual second wave came in?

Prochnow: No, we did not. We didn't get out before the actual second wave came in?

Marcello: What did you do after you finally did get out of the harbor and were beginning to drop these depth charges? Were you simply just milling out around out there in no organized fashion, or what?

Prochnow: Well, you might say that. We were just glad to be out of the harbor and looking back and seeing the rest of the harbor in flames, not really knowing how badly they were damaged. We were just glad to be out there, period. Of course, our immediate assignment by that time had been to patrol the area for anymore submarines--to see

if we could detect any submarines out there. And, of course, we had to be on standby for any more aircraft-- enemy aircraft.

Marcello: And again, there was probably a sense of satisfaction in that you were doing something, no matter unorganized or ineffective you were. Just the fact that you were doing something probably gave you some sense of satisfaction. You know, I've interviewed several people who have talked about men firing pistols or rifles or throwing rocks or potatoes, in one instance, at these planes. There was such a sense of frustration, and this was one of the ways, perhaps, of relieving that frustration. You had to do something.

Prochnow: Right, very true.

Marcello: As all of this was taking place, did you ever have an opportunity to pause for a moment, perhaps, and survey the damage that had been done, or was being done, in the harbor while the attack was taking place?

Prochnow: All that I can remember is that in looking back, for the next three or four days it was our duty to patrol the entrance to Pearl Harbor. In all that time all we could see was still smoke coming up from Pearl Harbor. Of course, we envisioned all kinds of things. Of course,



we had heard by that time the battleships had really been flung apart, so to speak, and that they had really been damaged very heavily. Something I didn't tell you while ago was that as we went out of the harbor that morning, the USS Nevada had been the only one of the big battleships that had really gotten underway. Of course, they finally got her right there in the channel itself, and it looked like she was going to block the whole channel. But somehow the skipper managed to beach her. This, he did, and we were able to go around the Nevada as we were going out, luckily.

Marcello: Yes, because if the Nevada had been sunk right there at the entrance of the harbor . . . well, it was like a cork in a bottle.

Prochnow: This is true. That's right. She had a hole in her bigger than a truck. You could see it, you know. It was awful.

Marcello: I think it is amazing the damage that one of these torpedoes, in particular, can do to a ship. I think most people probably envision maybe a hole three, four, five, six feet in diameter, but the hole that a torpedo leaves is big enough to drive a freight train through.

Prochnow: Well, this is true, and another thing that I remember now is where the USS Utah had pulled into the place where later on, I found out, that the USS Lexington was supposed to

have been. In my trying of getting these flags in the right place, I remember looking up one time, and I saw the Utah in an upright position. I daresay in the next five minutes I was looking over there again, and she was bottomsides-up. And this to me impressed me that here all of the sudden I see a ship and the next time I don't.

Marcello: You say it impressed you. What sort of emotions or feelings did you have when you saw something like that?

Prochnow: Well, that's hard to describe, I'll tell you. I guess you might say you're just scared to death, you know. It's just . . . and I was. I was scared. There's no question about it. It's just a feeling that you don't know how to describe.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that, of course, you did make it outside the harbor and were engaged, basically, in anti-submarine patrols. Did you stay out there for several days before you came back?

Prochnow: We stayed out approximately either four or five days. When we finally did get back in, or go back in, like we always did, it was always custom to line everybody up on the bow of the ship in total whites in uniform of the day and stand at attention as you were going into the harbor. Just as we approached the very entrance of Pearl itself, the signal came our way to get those

men out of white uniforms. Get them into dungarees. That signal came across, which I remember taking, very well that morning. "Get them off the whites." Because the whites were too much of a target. From thereafter, just blue denim was the order of the day.

Marcello: I would assume that while you were out there at sea that ship was one big rumor mill.

Prochnow: Very true. Everybody was talking and guessing as to what could have happened.

Marcello: What were some of the rumors that you heard? Can you recall them?

Prochnow: Well, of course, most of them were that "X" number of submarines had been shot . . . I mean, had been found in the harbor. This was exaggerated. I think later on they said there was only five. But, oh, there was supposedly a dozen or so in there. Then, of course, the enemy aircraft . . . I mean, that was the thing that was on everybody's mind--as to guessing as to how many were actually involved. We had outrageous guesses as to how many Japanese planes was really involved. Of course, there were quite a few, as I read now--350-some-odd Japanese planes involved in the attack. But somehow, it seemed like an awful lot more than that.

Marcello: In the aftermath of the attack, how did your attitude toward the Japanese change?

Prochnow: Well, my attitude hasn't changed much even to this day about the Japanese people. I regret this very much, but the very word hate, I guess, is the only thing I could say. This was our feeling. We just hated the Japs, period.

Marcello: Also, in the immediate aftermath of the attack, did you blame anybody for what had happened? In other words, did you try and find any scapegoats? Did you blame any of your superior officers or anything of this nature?

Prochnow: Well, as an individual, it was hard to say whose fault it really could have been. We were just guessing as to why it could have even happened, you know. This is getting back to the fact that I told you earlier--I had never seen so many ships in that harbor that morning. So later on, I even began to wonder about that. Why were so many of them in there that particular weekend?

Marcello: Just one last question. You mentioned that it was four days at least before you got back into the harbor again after you had gotten out. What did the scene look like before you when you came back in?

Prochnow: I just couldn't believe what I saw when I came back in. My first view, of course, going back into the harbor itself was the USS Nevada still beached with the hole in her side. Then looking at Battleship Row, this was what was sad because I had some friends aboard the USS Oklahoma, and she was the first ship in line, and she was completely bottomside-up. I'll tell you, it was just a feeling . . . seeing some of the battleships stuck together like matchsticks . . . no one would really believe how it really looked unless you actually saw it.

Marcello: Were there still fires and so on going four days later, or had all of those been brought under control?

Prochnow: No, they had still not been brought under control. There was still smoke coming up, and, of course, the oil coming on top of the surface in Pearl Harbor was just immense. The burning of that . . . you know, that took place, you know, of course, during the attack--the burning of the oil. And there was an awful lot of oil on top of the water inside Pearl Harbor.