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Interview with


FLOYD JENKINS

December 5, 1982

Place of Interview: San Antonio, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. R. E. Marcello

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Oral History Collection

Floyd Jenkins

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: San Antonio, Texas

Date: December 5, 1982

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Floyd Jenkins for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on December 5, 1982, in San Antonio, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Jenkins in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the auxiliary repair ship USS Rigel during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Jenkins, 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. Jenkins: I was born on June 7, 1921, in Altus, Oklahoma. I completed the ninth grade and part of the tenth grade, and I became a little disillusioned about school, so I quit. After a couple of years...well, my mother and father divorced, which was probably one of the reasons for this to happen, and I saw an opportunity to get out of school. So

I would spend part of the time with my father and part of the time with my mother.

When I was seventeen years old, I had become a little tired of bouncing back and forth, so the CCC at that time had come into being. My mother knew some people at home and got me into the CCC, and I spent eighteen months there. That life kind of agreed with me, it seemed like--the regimentation and everything. While I was in the CCC, I was in the medical end of it for probably eight months of the time. Then I became a truck driver and drove a truck for, oh, about six months, I guess.

Then I got out of the CCC and went back home, and, of course, there were no jobs available for kids at that time. A boyhood friend of mine who had been in the CCC camp, also, with me--we only lived a block apart--one day looked at me and said, "Floyd, I'm going to go into the Army Air Force." I kind of laughed. I said, "Hugh, come on down to the house with me." I took him back to my bedroom and opened a drawer, and there was all the literature on the Air Force (chuckle). Both of our minds were running in the same vein, but we didn't think that the other one would go for it.

Well, anyway, his uncle had a cafe in town, and we were sitting there one afternoon drinking a Coke and talking about going into the Army Air Corps--at that time. All of

a sudden, we were both lifted off of the seats. Uncle "Hub" was about five-by-five, and he just held us up, and he said, "I'll bang your heads together if you even think about going into the Army!" He said, "You're going in the Navy!" Well, we didn't argue with Uncle "Hub," needless to say. We asked him why, though. He said that in World War I he had been in the Marines and in going over to France, why, he noticed that the Navy was a pretty good deal, by golly. So he influenced us to try for the Navy, anyway.

So we went down to Wichita Falls, Texas, to the sub-recruiting office, and we had it made up between us that "Okay, well, if one of us flunks out, the other will just step out, and we'll make the rounds, anyway." That afternoon about three o'clock, we are still sitting going through the tests and everything that they gave us. The chief petty officer that they had at the recruiting station said, "You boys have made it." So we asked him, "Well, when you call us in, be sure to call us together." He said, "Okay."

We went back home, and about a month later we got a little postcard in the mail saying to report to the recruiting office there in Wichita Falls. So we went back to Wichita Falls, and, of course, being a sub-recruiting office, why, they sent us on down to Dallas. In Dallas we raised our right hand and said, "I do." Therefore, we were in the Navy.

In boot camp, when we were taking our AQT's and things for schools, why, we put in for the Hospital Corps. Of course, we both got it. After our recruit training there in San Diego, we went to the Hospital Corps school at San Diego Hospital, and we completed the training there. Of course, if your grade was high enough, you got a choice. It was the incentive to do a little better in school. My grade was high enough that I chose Bremerton, Washington, and he, of course, had to stay in San Diego. He had goofed off a little bit (chuckle).

Well, I went on to Bremerton and stayed there about six months, at which time I got orders to go over to Sand Point Naval Air Station. After being there a couple of months, all at once they discovered that I wasn't supposed to be there, that I was supposed to be in the Philippines. Of course, I got my orders to go to sea, and I got the Rigel. It was an old ship.

Marcello: Where did you pick up the Rigel?

Jenkins: At Bremerton--what naval shipyard there. They brought it out of San Diego. The old ship was built in 1918 in a period of seventy-two days. During the peacetime, in between World War I and World War II, they had converted it to a repair ship and had it tied up at San Diego. It was ol' Captain McCandless's flower ship, they called it. He had quarters on it. It set there for I-don't-know-how-many years, and they swore up and down that it was mired in coffee grounds because it had been

setting there so long.

Anyway, in 1941, they broke it loose and brought it up to Bremerton and started an overhaul period. On the crew of the Rigel, we had the repair gang that put those fifty destroyers into commission for Britain, if you remember back then, which made them a very experienced bunch of fellows. We set there at Bremerton Naval Shipyard for a couple of months after I got aboard. They got it fixed up enough that we could get to Hawaii, to Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Let me back up a little bit and ask you a couple of questions that I should have asked earlier.

Jenkins: Sure.

Marcello: When was it that you went into the Navy?

Jenkins: May 21, 1940, was the date that I signed my oath of allegiance.

Marcello: And when did you pick up the Rigel?

Jenkins: I picked up the Rigel in Bremerton in May of 1941. It was just one year later.

Marcello: So you were actually in the Hawaii Islands above five or six months before the attack took place.

Jenkins: Yes. We got over there in July. On July 11 or July 13, we arrived at the old coal docks in Pearl Harbor and tied up there, oh, for a few weeks until they could get the dock cleared; and then they moved us on around to Ten-Ten (1010) Dock. The old hammerhead crane that was setting at the end of this dock at that time was supposed to be one of the largest

hammerhead cranes in the world. The reason why they sent us over there was because they tore the bridge off and lifted the boilers out. This is the way that the Japs saw it whenever they came in on Sunday morning. Why they dropped two bombs at us, we will never know, We will never figure that out. I guess they must have thought that it was somehow a secret ship because we had the cruisers and "cans" laying right over in the same slip that we was in. The Honolulu and Saint Louis and the New Orleans and a bunch of destroyers was tied up almost next door to us.

Marcello: Just exactly what function did the Rigel have? We mentioned that it was an auxiliary repair vessel. What kinds of ships did it basically service?

Jenkins: At the time they were getting the thing in shape to where it could really service ships. Up until this time, we had not really service ships. Up until this time, we had not really performed any functions. They were putting these new boilers in because they were high-pressure steam boilers, and this was to run all the machinery aboard ship and everything.

I got a sneaking hunch that somebody knew something at the time, and they wasn't telling anybody because they were getting this ship ready prior to the attack. Later, it really paid off because of the function that we served later on in the future campaigns.

Marcello: I gather, from what you say, that this refurbishing of the

Rigel took place both at Bremerton and then also in Pearl itself.

Jenkins: Right. Actually, the main work was done at Pearl Harbor, really. The work that was done in the shipyard at Bremerton... they were fixing up the quarters and things of this nature and getting the propulsion system into shape to where it could even make the trip out of Pearl. It took us eleven days to make the trip from Bremerton to Pearl, which was quite awhile. We could only make about six knots or so. After they replaced the boilers and everything, of course, we could make top speed at ten knots then. One time we were going from Espiritu Santo to Australia, and Jap submarine got on us. I think we made ten-and-a-half knots that day (chuckle). Anyway, that gives you an idea of the speed of the thing.

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

Jenkins: Well, of course, being a young man of about nineteen years old, I was real thrilled about the idea. Of course, I had heard about the Hawaiian Islands, but having never been there, why, I was kind of looking forward to it. Of course, we got over there in July, which was a good time to arrive there, and it was real nice, as far as I was concerned. Of course, this was in the days before it really got commercialized. These were the days, like, when you remember back to what Honolulu actually was in those days. You see it now, and you wonder, "My God, what's happened!"

Marcello: I guess, at that particular time, there were only two hotels of any size along Waikiki, weren't there--the Royal Hawaiian and the Moana?

Jenkins: Yes, that was just about it, and the beach in those days, of course, was...I don't think that it was as big as it is now. I think they import sand now to widen it out a little bit (chuckle). When I went back last year, why, it was a little different to say the least.

Marcello: At the time that you joined the service, how closely were you keeping abreast of current events and world affairs and things of that nature?

Jenkins: Well, I know everybody was kidding me that, "Well, you're just going to be cannon fodder." So I told them, "Well, if we're going to have something, I may as well get in now and get a little training and know a little something about it." Of course, I had never seen anything larger than Lake Altus, though (chuckle). Like I say, Uncle "Hub" Grider was the instigator in us two coming into the Navy. Of course, my boyfriend was Hugh Grider.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the life aboard the Rigel. Describe what your quarters were like aboard the Rigel.

Jenkins: Well, being in the medical department, our quarters was in the same area where the sickbay was. We had bunks three bunks high. Our lockers, of course, surrounded us and kind of partitioned off the area that was the old number one hold.

They had decked over about half of it, and over this half of it is where your quarters was put. Of course, a small division, being the medical department, there probably wasn't over sixteen of us, if there was that many. Twelve would be more like it at that time in the Hospital Corps. We had two doctors--a senior medical officer and a junior medical officer. The junior medical officer was J. W. Cowan, a young lieutenant j.g. that had come in. He was one prince of a man. I think that he was from North Dakota and part-Indian. The expression "tall, dark, and handsome" really applied to this guy, plus the fact that he had a personality about him that I could be standing in the operating room with my back to the door, and I knew when he would walk in without even turning around. He was this type of person--one wonderful man. At the time he had come in on a year deal, and he could have the opportunity to back out if he wanted to. We kind of talked him into it, and he kind of liked the Navy. Of course, the Japanese made his mind up for him. He stayed in and later became an admiral in the Navy.

Marcello: What was the complement of the Rigel at that time?

Jenkins: Well, at that time we probably had four hundred men aboard. We still did not have all of our facilities and everything fixed up, like, quarters for the crew. If I remember correctly, we probably had four hundred men aboard at that time, and later on a complement of about six hundred.

Marcello: Let's talk a little more about shipboard life. What was the food like aboard the Rigel?

Jenkins: Listen, we had one of the best commissary stewards that there ever was. This ol' chief really believed in feeding. If you talk to any of the men that were sent over to the Rigel after the attack, they'll tell you one thing that they remember was the food. It was good. But this man really hustled. He'd go out,..he had an old pick-up truck that he had obtained, and he would go out on his own and get fresh vegetables and things that really complimented the fare. This was one of the best feeding ships there was in the Navy beyond a doubt. We had a bake shop aboard, and bakers kept everything fresh--fresh bread, all the pastries, and everything. Of course, in this overhaul we had there, they put in a "geedunk" shop, so we had ice cream and everything that went with it. This was so that when the destroyers that would come alongside, why, they could come over and get a few of the amenities that they missed aboard the smaller ships.

Life aboard the Rigel...I'll tell you, I was sure happy that I was on that ship because it was a good ship. We had a very fine commanding officer and a wonderful "exec," and, of course, this permeates the officer corps right on down through the crew then. It was a ship for a young sailor to come aboard and spend his first few years in, and that kind of

shaped my future thinking of the Navy. Of course, I spent thirty years in the Navy. I put a full hitch in and retired after thirty years. I learned a lot, especially from this young junior medical officer we had. He believed in teaching his corpsmen to do anything and everything as soon as possible. I spent quite a bit of time in the operating room, in the ward, in the pharmacy, in the lab. I had quite a good grounding for a corpsman aboard this ship.

Marcello: I was going to ask you if you had a particular speciality as a corpsman aboard the ship, but I gather that you did a little bit of everything.

Jenkins: A little bit of everything. Actually, this makes a good corpsman, if you can find one that has this experience. It led me into...later on, after the war was over, I was a chief petty officer, and I served independent duty for practically the next fifteen years both ashore and afloat. It's good duty when you're your own boss more or less. As long as you do things and do it right, why, it keeps the commanding officer happy; if you keep him happy, why, you're going to be happy. Of course, I always liked to be well-liked by the crew and everything, so I figured, "Well, if I do a few extra things here and there, it always makes good morale and everything." I always enjoyed my tour in the Navy--the whole thirty years of it, really.

Marcello: It all started here with this very good experience that you

had on the Rigel.

Jenkins: Aboard the Rigel. Yes, it did.

Marcello: How slow or fast was promotion in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy, and I'm referring specifically to the particular rating that you had.

Jenkins: When I went up to Bremerton, I was what you would call a "HA deuce," which was a hospital apprentice second class, which is E-2. While at Bremerton, I made HM, hospitalman first class, which was pay grade E-3. I went aboard the Rigel, and I made third class on July 1, and next day I got busted back to HN. But before I got through a captain's mast, he had rated me third class again (chuckle). I guess my story was a pretty good story for the "exec" to do that.

Right after the attack on Pearl Harbor, we went aboard the Solace and took our exam for pharmacist's mate second class, which at that time was a fleet-wide type of exam. Let's see...that attack was on Sunday, and on Friday we had this exam. Needless to say, we had no time to bone up ahead of time or anything on it. Anyway, my grades--except in chemistry--was pretty good, but in chemistry, with no more background than I had on school, I didn't do very well in it. The doctor said, "Well, we're going to take care of that for you. Don't worry about it." Later on, I made second class off of this particular exam.

Marcello: The attack occurred on December 7, and then on the Friday

following December 7, you took the test. But again, how slow were or fast was promotion in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy?

Jenkins: Actually, along about that time, the rates started to open up. A lot of our first class petty officers at the time had been first class for, oh, ten or twelve years. You know, they'd sit there and they stayed because the chiefs were staying, the first class was staying; and if you hadn't made it by that time, why, you just didn't make it. After the war started, of course, there were a lot of openings, and from then on the advancement path was just wide-open, you might say. In fact, I made chief...I lacked twenty days of having four years in the Navy when I made chief petty officer.

Marcello: And in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy, how long would it have taken you?

Jenkins: Oh, Lord, some guys never did because there were just no rates open. If they was first class, why, that's where they would stay, and they retired as first class. If they were lucky enough to have made chief, they was hanging on and retiring as chief. That was the only way that you got an opening, was that either the guy died or retired. Well, there was one opening, and somebody would snap it up. Promotion was awfully slow--awfully slow. But then everything else was, too. I think that a chief petty officer with a permanent

appointment at that time drew \$125 a month and lived like a king (chuckle). I know that I came in at \$21 a month (chuckle).

Marcello: Let's continue with our talk about everyday life aboard the Rigel and even ashore. Describe how the liberty routine worked for the Rigel. I assume that when you got to Pearl, you really didn't do too much except stay there and continue with that overhaul, is that correct?

Jenkins: Well, that was primarily true. We had what we called three-section liberty. You got liberty every third day, and then you stood the duty the other two days. But we didn't have much money, so it didn't matter. Life aboard the ship wasn't all that bad. We had a movie every night.

I'd get up in the morning and go through my routine and then go to chow and come back. Well, then it was time for sick call. Having a rather large crew, why, of course, and then being that repair work was going on, we had a few accidents and a few injuries and then the normal, routine bellyaches and things of that nature, back strains--routine sick call. That would take up, oh, an hour-and-a-half or two hours in the morning. We would screen all the minor stuff that a corpsman could take care of. We would take care of it. Then the guys with tonsillitis and things of that nature, colds, if they were pretty severe, had a little temperature, why, we would save them for the doctor. When

he'd come down, then he'd go through and take care of the rest of them, and from then on through the rest of the day, why, it was taking care of fixing this up and taking care of that--routine stuff.

Then at 1600 you knocked off work, and if you was lucky, you had liberty and would go ashore for a while--if you had any money left, that is. Otherwise, we would have a movie at night. With the camaraderie of the fellows there in the crew--playing cards at night and taking and listening to the radio, whatever--time seemed to go by fairly quickly. All in all, it was a happy time, actually.

Marcello: Was there very much gambling that took place aboard the Rigel on payday and so on?

Jenkins: No. We had one group that would have some pretty high stakes stuff, but they were old hands at it and everything. Us young ones knew to stay away from that. Not only we didn't have the money, but we didn't have the know-how to stay with it. I'll tell you some more about this after we get through and after the attack--about what took place. In pre-Pearl, why, I could say that some of the old hands would slip around...of course, it was against the rules and regulations to do it, so you had to be a little careful about it.

Marcello: What were the chances of getting overnight liberty?

Jenkins: Well, you could. It was possible, sure. If you had some-

thing to do, you could go to your division officer and say, "I'd like to have an overnight liberty." Every once in awhile, they'd grant it. Like I say, it cost a little bit, and, of course, by that time I was an HA-1. I was making \$54 a month, so...when I was third class, I was making \$60 a month.

Marcello: Normally, when would you have to back aboard the Rigel?

Jenkins: Midnight. I'll tell you about this when we get to the night before the attack.

Marcello: When you went ashore, what did you normally do?

Jenkins: We'd go along the beach and gaze at the girls and wish we had more money. We would visit the bars. You could drink over there...the legal age was twenty years old, so you would go to the bars and have a drink and just shoot the breeze. Usually, it would be three or four of you that would go ashore together...go to a movie. It was just a normal, routine thing for a bunch of sailors to be over there gawking around like the rest of them.

Marcello: Did you do much prowling around Hotel Street, Canal Street?

Jenkins: Oh, Lord, that was about the only streets in those days that there was (chuckle). You know what went on and took place there. Yes, I spent my share of time down there.

Marcello: How much did a trick cost?

Jenkins: Two bucks. And these were the best-looking girls that there were. They imported them out of the States, but them girls were

hungry, too. They were no doubt the best-looking women that they could find to send over there. And at two bucks, they'd give you a little time. One hotel ordinarily you would wind up visiting back and forth, and you would get to know one girl, and you'd come in and ask for that girl-- Penny or Sandy or whatever, you know. You'd go back, and you'd yak a little bit and knock off your trick. They were very casual about it--no hurry-up or anything--and very pleasant. For two bucks, what the heck--you could afford that every once in awhile, and that kept the pressures down.

Marcello: Now is it not true that these were more or less...maybe government-regulated isn't a good word to use, but they were closely supervised, were they not?

Jenkins: They were examined every so often. We had very little VD out of it. In fact, aboard ship the VD treatment that we gave was primarily for the ol' boys out of China that had syphilis-- the bismuth and mapharsen routine for getting rid of it. You'd give them bismuth in the butt for a certain period of time-- four weeks, I think it was, or so--and then we'd give it in the arm intravenously. Boy, that stuff was murder because if you missed a vein and got just a drop of that mapharsen outside the vein, why, boy, they'd swell up, and you have to ice-pack it. It is very painful.

Marcello: Mapharsen--I have never heard of that,

Jenkins: Mapharsen. The reason I know this is because I was a guy that

was given that stuff. A doctor...here again, I'll bring back Dr. Cowan because he taught me how to give that needle in the vein and everything, and I became very proficient at it. From then on, I gave all the intravenous stuff, so I got to know all of these guys real well (chuckle). I'd pat them on the butt every month (chuckle).

Marcello: Now did you say that the government was actually responsible for sending these girls over?

Jenkins: No, no, no. These were the houses of ill-repute that was out there. Of course, in those days they wasn't ill-repute; they was good-repute, really (chuckle). Certain houses had a pipeline, I guess, set up, and they would recruit them on the West Coast, and they'd send the girls over. After they made a few bucks or got tired of life or whatever, why, they'd send them back. They had a constant flow of them, really. I know this one girl...I was sitting there...I got to know one of the madames real well in one of the houses. I'd sit there in the office and drink or talk with her. I know one night she knocked off sixty, and this was only about eight o'clock. As far as they was concerned, they was making money hand-over-fist (chuckle). They were experts at that.

Marcello: (Chuckle) You did say sixty, didn't you?

Jenkins: I said sixty--I sure did--because, see, there in the office, they'd keep track because these girls got a commission and the madame got a commission off it and everything. Each time

they'd get a trick, they'd come in and mark a little "X" by their name. Like I say, I got to know the madame real well, and she was a "looker" herself. I knew how they kept score and everything, and I looked at that sixty of them by eight o'clock, Now this was on a weekend. This was on a Saturday, when you got liberty at noon, you know. It was quite a business, needless to say (chuckle).

Marcello: Evidently, she was an enterprising woman.

Jenkins: That wasn't too abnormal, really, for a girl to have that much by that time. She was pretty much of a hustler, though; she worked pretty quick. Some of the girls didn't like to work fast, Naturally, they didn't make as much money, but I think that they gave satisfaction and everything (chuckle).

Marcello: Awhile ago, you were taking about those Asiatic sailors. They are quite a breed, weren't they?

Jenkins: Oh, yes. Those ol' boys would go out there...of course, China in those days was the top duty, really, and everything, choice duty. Unfortunately, they'd come back, and, oh, Lord, a lot of them acquired syphilis while they was out there in that area. In those days the detection--what we called the Kahn Test--for syphilis was very touchy thing. We found out later on that these men had been cured for years, actually. They were still receiving treatment, but they were still calling a...it was Kahn fast. They would pull a "4 plus," which was an indication of syphilis. This was because the

the test was too touchy. It was picking this up, and... actually, there was no way they could pass it on or anything. They was way past that stage and everything. They received treatment that--they found out later--was not really necessary. Eventually, we knocked off...even though they was pulling "4 pluses," we knew that this Kahn fast...they no longer would have the syphilis, really.

Marcello: And this was Kahn fast?

Jenkins: Kahn was the name of the test. The old Wasserman Test was the first test for syphilis, and then the Kahn Test came along. It was just a laboratory procedure that was set up to test the blood for this particular disease. So finally, we knocked off treating those people because they knew that they was cured and that they was out of the infectious stage.

Marcello: I understand that those Asiatic sailors also had plenty of tattoos.

Jenkins: Oh, yes, yes. Of course, these was the old hands out there. The young fellows coming in and everything, well, we kind of looked up to them. Most all of them were first class petty officers. Boy, they could tell you some hair-raising stories. But they were good sailors. In fact, later on, they really proved themselves--later in the war--when we got the ship back to where it was supposed to be.

Marcello: I've heard some people talk about the Asiatic stares. Did you ever hear that expression? In other words, it looked

sometimes like those guys were maybe looking directly at you but kind of past you or something like that.

Jenkins: Yes, but I never did run into that. These fellows that we had aboard ship, like I say, were good sailors, good workers. I never thought nothing about it, but I don't know. Maybe I missed something (chuckle).

Marcello: I notice that you've got a few tattoos. Did you get those on Hotel Street?

Jenkins: No. Let's see...I got these in San Diego while I was still in boot camp. I was very careful. When I was drinking, I wouldn't get a tattoo. I knew better than that. I wanted to know what was going to be put on. These things didn't cost much, and they didn't bother me, so I had a couple anchors put on. I got a heart with a dagger (chuckle) right here (gesture). I was looking around for a tattoo that would be a little unusual. Usually, they'd have this heart and this dagger here (gesture), so I said, "What the heck! Why not put it over the heart!" So I went in this tattoo joint--this one was on Hotel Street--and I just picked this out. I told the guy, "I want this around my nipple." He said, "Well, I've never put one there before." I said, "Well, what's to prevent you from doing it?" He said, "Well, I guess nothing." So there's a big heart right around my nipple with a dagger coming through it with blood coming down. That blood was what hurt. The other didn't bother me much because

it's in the fatty muscle tissue there. But, boy, when he put that blood there, it put it close to rib cage, and I was keeping time with my foot with that needle (chuckle).

Marcello: So instead of getting it on the forearm, where you usually got that tattoo, you got it over your heart.

Jenkins: Yes. When I go swimming, everybody kind of looks at that. It's a little unusual.

Marcello: What would be the general condition of people when they came back aboard the Rigel after coming off liberty, let's say, on a Saturday night?

Jenkins: Some of them might be a little inebriated, but they never had to be helped aboard. This was one thing about that crew. I guess they could "hold their liquor," would be the expression. We never had any problems or anything with people coming back aboard ship staggering and uniform messed up. They knew that if they did, why, they was going to pay the price for it. Everybody seemed to be capable of holding their booze, I guess. When I came back aboard that ship, I know I was walking a straight line (chuckle).

Marcello: Now you mentioned that when the Rigel got over to Pearl Harbor, it essentially moved over to Ten-Ten Dock and kind of stayed there while it was undergoing further overhaul.

Jenkins: Yes. We had gotten under that hammerhead crane so that it could lift these boilers up because that was a tremendous weight, of course, putting the new ones on and lifting all this

steel to rebuild the bridge and the quarters. At the time they built the admiral's quarters on because we were going to be a flagship, too. Then they put a deckhouse on the after part of the ship and built it all up for the supply office and disbursing office and that type of thing. Of course, they brought some new machinery aboard. The old ship was well-equipped with lathes, and we had a foundry aboard ship. We could just about take care of anything that was necessary, which later we did.

Marcello: Yes, those repair ships are just fascinating to me when I hear people talking about all the various things that they could do.

Jenkins: Yes, it was amazing what they could do. Of course, a lot of it was the ingenuity of the crew, too. If they didn't have it, why, some way or another, they were able to perform miracles, you might say--the work that they did do. We took care of some cruisers and destroyers later at the Battle of Savo Island at Guadalcanal, and they proved themselves up there.

Marcello: So at the time of the attack, the Rigel was really in no condition to go to sea or anything of that nature.

Jenkins: She wasn't in condition to do anything except set right there alongside that dock. In fact, we never even had a .45...like, the boys on some of the ships threw potatoes at them, but I don't think that anyone had even thought about throwing potatoes. Primarily, we became engaged in rescue work,

which we couldn't do that,,we were sending boats out and everything,

Marcello: I guess that with you being there at Ten-Ten Dock, you didn't have to take a liberty boat to go ashore. You could just walk right ashore.

Jenkins: Sure. You could walk right in from the bus that came right by the ship, and that way we didn't have to wait for a liberty boat to come and pick us up or anything. As long as we got back aboard by midnight, well, we was okay.

Marcello: What was the attraction of the Black Cat Cafe?

Jenkins: (Laughter) It was right across the street from the YMCA. That's where the buses loaded and unloaded. That would be the first place you were going to go to get a drink or the last place that you were going to get a drink. Then you'd go and catch the bus and then go back to Pearl.

Marcello: I almost cracked up when I checked into the hotel a couple days ago because one of the cabs setting outside was the Black Cat Cab Company.

Jenkins: (Chuckle) I wondered if they got the name from over there.

Marcello: Okay, I think that this brings us into that weekend of December 7, 1941, but before we talk about that weekend, let me ask you this. As one gets closer and closer to December 7, and as conditions between the two countries continued to get worse, could you detect any change at all in your routine aboard the Rigel?

Jenkins: Not really. Apparently, there was no change. I had no feeling at all of anything, other than the war clouds coming closer because of Germany and everything. But as far as a feeling of Japan attacking and everything, I don't think so. We didn't have any feeling whatsoever about it. We knew they was out there, but as far as something happening immediately, I don't think so. We just didn't have any inkling.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk a little bit about that weekend of December 7. Let's talk about Saturday, December 6. Describe your routine.

Jenkins: I was on liberty that day. A kid that I had gone through boot camp with was on the West Virginia--a gunner's mate. He and I had arranged to meet over in the "Y" there in Honolulu on Saturday and spend some time together--he and two other fellows off of the West Virginia. We met and they had overnight liberty, the lucky rascals. So they got a room at the "Y," and we sat around and shot the breeze for a while, and then we decided to walk down to Hotel Street and have a drink or two, which we did.

Marcello: How crowded was Hotel Street?

Jenkins: It was crowded. It was crowded, and the booze was flowing. I don't remember us really ever having to buy many drinks that afternoon or evening. I know that we wound up with, I think, three or four quarts of whiskey that we stashed up in

the hotel room at the "Y" there, that we were going to have the next day. We were going to throw a party the next day, and I think that our eyes got the best of us. I don't think that we could have ever got through that much whiskey with that many of us up there (chuckle). We made the rounds, and, of course, we stopped in a couple of the places and visited with the girls. I had to go back aboard ship that evening by midnight.

Marcello: You probably would have had a little bit of money yet because payday would have just been the week before.

Jenkins: Yes, Oh, yes. I think that we got paid on the 5th and the 20th in those days. We were paid on a Thursday, so I was ripe for the Saturday.

Like I say, I had to go back aboard the ship at midnight, but I was supposed to get liberty the next morning. I was going to meet them back up at the "Y" the next morning.

Anyway, like I say, it was one hectic Saturday night. In fact, we was out in the Waikiki area making the places out there...dancing. Like I say, the booze was flowing, and I guess that you've heard this before. I guess if we had really been thinking, that would have been a tip-off that something was in the air because that had not happened like that previously. Before, we was having to buy our drinks if we wanted one, but that night it seemed like you had a drink in your hand before you knew it. There was plenty of

of liquor on that island that night, and they was putting it out, too.

Marcello: So you really don't know who was buying it.

Jenkins: Oh, no. It was there, so I have a feeling...now, looking back in retrospect, I know what was happening, of course, because they wanted us to be woozy the next morning.

Marcello: So you think that there were probably Japanese agents and so on buying this booze.

Jenkins: I'm sure. I'm sure that there were. It would certainly be in keeping with the long-range planning that Japan done, which was pretty smart. I know that if I had wanted to start something like that in a country, why, that would be a good way to keep the fellows that are going to be looking at you the next day kind of woozy-eyed.

The next morning, when I woke up...I got up, and I was in the head shaving and brushing my teeth, taking care of the necessary things, and I heard this "BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!" I said to myself, "They aren't having target practice this morning, surely!" Besides that, I was having a little bit of a headache. I stuck my head out of the porthole just in time to see a couple of puffs of smoke coming out of the Oklahoma. I was looking kind of at an angle, looking right at her, and I said, "Good golly, that don't look right!"

I stood there, I guess, a few minutes, and the Argonne, which was another repair ship right over from us...and all at

once they started firing. I guess it was somebody up on their guns. This Japanese plane was coming right down the channel just about, oh, mast-high. This fellow zeroed in on him and hit him, and when he flew up like that (gesture), why, I saw the red ball on top of the wing because they didn't have anything painted...I don't remember seeing a red ball on the side of the plane or under the wings. It was just on top of the wing, and when he kind of zoomed up after being hit, I saw him, and I said, "Oh, my God, that's Japanese!" I realized then that this was no practice, that this was a real thing then.

About that time the boatswain started sounding General Quarters. At that time, of course, we had no battle dressing stations set up because we was undergoing all this overhaul period and everything, so the only facilities that we did have at all was right at sickbay itself.

Somebody had the presence of mind to say, "Well, what if the sickbay gets hit and takes us all out." So we decided to set up a battle dressing station on the next deck below us in one of the machine shops because our storeroom was on the deck below that. They could feed us supplies right up to set up a battle dressing station right up in that area.

Marcello: It is called a battle...

Jenkins: ...a battle dressing station. Usually, aboard a ship, why, you will have several battle dressing stations, the idea

that if one section get knocked out, you still got medical facilities over in the other section. It is also to disperse the flow of the wounded so they all don't get stacked up in one place. Needless to say, that was my primary mission, and the medical department's primary mission, then, was to get another battle dressing station set up so that we could take care of the influx of casualties, which later on during the day they started flowing in.

Marcello: I was going to ask you when the casualties did start coming in.

Jenkins: It was later on. In fact, we had the dressing stations set up in the next compartment in the deck below from our regular sickbay when we started getting casualties. In fact, one of the first casualties that I can remember was right off the ship itself. We had a motor whaleboat setting in the bow of the ship, and the engineer had gotten into the boat and had the engine going, and the coxswain and the bowhook was coming down the pilings to get into the boat. When they looked up, this Jap was flying over, and he dropped a bomb. Well, the engineer thought it was coming right at him, so he jumped out of the motor whaleboat, and the coxswain and the bowhook swung around from behind the piling. Well, the bomb hit the after end of that motor whaleboat and took out the rudder and everything else. It tore it right off. Luckily, it was a delayed-action bomb, and it

went on down to the bottom there before it exploded. Well, it caught the engineer in the water, and it crushed his chest. The bowhook and the coxswain jumped in and got him and brought him up to the battle dressing station. He was spitting blood and, of course, complaining about the compression. So we later sent him over to the hospital, figuring that this boy had just about had it, and do you know that within a week's time he was back aboard and on duty. It was just one of those weird things. While he was spitting the blood and everything, it was superficial. We had thought that perhaps his chest was caved in, but as it turned out, it wasn't. He recovered very quickly.

Marcello: Would it be safe to say that you perhaps didn't see too much of what actually went on outside?

Jenkins: During the attack, other than looking out and seeing the Oklahoma get hit and the West Virginia taking some bombs... the West Virginia was right ahead of the Oklahoma. I was thinking to myself, "Boy, I'm sure glad that my friend and the two other guys are on overnight liberty over there because they would have been aboard." I vaguely remember seeing the Arizona taking some hits, and after seeing this plane hit by the Argonne and realizing that this was not a drill or anything...well, from then on I would get to look out...once in awhile I would go up for water because we had no water in that area. I'd grab a pail and run up to our

sterilizing room--we had a little sink and everything there--to get water to take back down below.

One time I came up, and here was the shell end of a 1.1 laying on the deck in the sterilizing room. We had no guns aboard ship--nothing like that--so the only thing that we could figure out later on was that it came through the porthole. Like I say, we had all these cruisers alongside of us, and they had 1.1's on them. Someway or other, this thing was laying there on deck, and I picked it up and took it back down with me. Later on, why, I got one of the guys to mount it on a brass mounting and everything, and I had it for a paper weight for years and years. I don't know where it has gone to. All of a sudden, it's gone, and I don't remember what happened to it. It was weird that this thing was...I'm sure glad that I wasn't in there getting water at the time that it came through that porthole--I know that!

Marcello: Is it kind of disconcerting to be below deck and know that there is all kinds of action taking place outside, and you really have no knowledge of what's taking place?

Jenkins: Really, at that time I have no recollection of that because of the shock, I believe, of knowing that we was under attack, and being so busy, you really didn't have that much time to consider it. Later on, you did, but at the particular time that it was happening, you were so busy that you just didn't have time. All you could think of was getting set up and

everything.

Marcello: And how long did it take you to set up that battle dressing station?

Jenkins: Well, it probably took an hour to get the cots and dressings and everything set up in the manner in which we wanted. Of course, by that time the Oglala and...I think it was the Honolulu that was right alongside the Oglala. The torpedo had gone under her and hit the retaining wall, sea wall, that it was tied up at. Well, there were a lot of flash burns off the Honolulu, and they brought some of them over for us to take care of because we were just right across from them.

Like I say, our primary mission that day was taking care of the wounded, and also...the ship itself...our contributions was our boats to evacuate. In fact, we had one boat...I know later on I cut a little deal out of the Honolulu paper that was talking about this destroyer tender, which was us...one boat crew had rescued over a hundred men-- just the one boat crew--and we had sent all of our boats out to take the guys out of the water and everything.

I know we had a bomb that dropped...this one I was telling you about...we had one that dropped aft of us then that hit the hawser. We had these big steel hawsers that was holding us to the dock. It exploded on contact and put about 149 shrapnel holes in the fantail and did some damage in the after end of the ship. I don't remember, but somebody

told me later that somebody was killed back there. But I am not sure about that. I don't remember that.

Marcello: When did the casualties start coming in? Do you remember about what time this occurred?

Jenkins: Oh, gosh! Since the attack happened about seven fifty-five, it probably...they was getting organized...it took us about an hour to get everything organized, so it was probably within an hour that we started getting the flow in.

Marcello: And what was the nature of the casualties that were coming in at your battle dressing station?

Jenkins: They were primarily...I remember this one kid that had the chest compression, and I know that up in the sickbay itself we was getting burn casualties in up there. Down below we were taking care of the minor stuff. A guy that would get an injury or something, why, we would take care of him and send him back to duty or something like that. It wasn't all that many through us, but we was taking some casualties.

I know that the hammerhead crane...I understand that the civilian crew that they had on this ol' hammerhead crane--I don't blame them, either--took off. So they had some PT boats alongside, so they called for volunteers to man this crane to get those PT boats off, and some of our men volunteered. I don't know if any of the fellows off the Ramapo, which was tied up right behind us, were involved in this, either. They say that as they were lifting one of

the PT boats off, why, a kid got a .50-caliber warmed up and shot a plane down as he was being swung out over it. I tell you, though, it took a lot of guts to go up in the crane because it was sticking way up there. It was a prime target if they ever wanted it. But they wasn't after that; they was after those battleships and what they thought was the carriers--where they would be.

I went up on deck about, I guess, two o'clock or two-thirty that afternoon when it got a little little lull and everything. This was after the bombing had stopped when I went out there. You could look out over and see all the damage, and I thought to myself, "My God, the fleet is gone!"

Marcello: Describe what you saw.

Jenkins: Well, I looked over, and here was the Arizona with smoke billowing out of it. It was setting on the bottom--burning. The Arizona...well, I had a special spot for it because I had been transported...~~when~~ whenever I went from San Diego up to Bremerton, I rode the Arizona up, and I was aboard it for about six weeks. In those days they didn't get in any hurry. If they were sending you somewhere, and a ship was also going there, well, that's the way you went. So I caught it at Long Beach, and, of course, we stayed in the sickbay. They had a rather large sickbay, and we even slept there. That was our quarters while we was going there. We got to, of course, know who the crew was, and some of the fellows that

I had gone through boot camp with was aboard the Arizona.

So when I looked at it, I really got a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach when I saw that because I knew that I had lost some friends on there, which it later proved out that I did. Sickbay happened to be right below the forward gun mount, and that's where the ~~ammunition~~ blew up and everything. So they was all killed. The friends that I had aboard there, that I had been through boot camp with--some of the seamen--they was, of course, killed.

Marcello: How about the Oklahoma? Did you see it?

Jenkins: The Oklahoma? Yes, like I say, I saw the torpedoes going into her, and when I went up, well, there it was--turned upside down.

Marcello: What were your thoughts when you saw a battleship turned upside down?

Jenkins: I'll tell you, I figured that if they could sink those rascals, well, they could sink anything. It was just..."God, have we lost the war already?" You could see all of this damage done and everything, and, of course, you hear rumors. Oh, the rumors were rife that day. "They're landing at Barbers Point." "There are three transports out there and a battle force." "The Japanese are landing, and they're headed toward us." We heard all of this stuff, which later proved to be nothing but rumors. But then, we didn't know.

Marcello: What did the surface of the water look like?

Jenkins: It was oily--naturally, it would be--and it was still burning at that time. There were fires going everywhere. The West Virginia was burning; the Oklahoma was upside down; the Arizona was burning; and the California setting on the bottom. It's hard to describe, even though you was there and everything. You think back and recollect what your feelings was. You know, time has a healing effect, I guess, but I know yesterday, when they had that "Tora! Tora!" attack out there, there was a few tears in the old yes.

Marcello: You are referring to the performance that was put on by the Confederate Air Force.

Jenkins: Yes, by the Confederate Air Force. The feelings, the emotions, carried you back to that day. Here again, it was brought back up to the surface, I guess. You'd think it has been buried a long time, but...

Marcello: Other than your thoughts that the fleet had perhaps been destroyed, what other emotions did you have? I'm referring to such things as fear, frustration, anger--anything of that nature.

Jenkins: Anger, of course. Frustration, yes. Fear? Of course, we was afraid, sure, but I think every man was. You're so busy at the time that the fear comes later--not at the time. I'll relate some experiences later to you when I was in the Battle of Iwo Jima and places like that. I'd ask myself questions like that. Of course, I'd lie to myself and say I

wasn't afraid.

But, like I say, it'd be anger; frustration, yes. Fear at the particular time that it was happening? No, I really don't think so. You don't have time, really, when you're undergoing the thing. I don't remember the feeling of fear. I know that I was scared, sure. I think that every man that goes into battle has a certain element of fear there, but you keep a cap on it. You keep it bottled up. If you don't, you're in trouble. That's the way I look at it. I know that people that crack under combat, which I had first-hand experience with and everything...I think that those are the guys who admitted that they were scared, and they let it overcome their...

Marcello: Some people have told me that their biggest concern was not necessarily fear for themselves but a fear that they might let their shipmates down and not do their job.

Jenkins: That's true. I think that. Here again, though, I think this is where training comes into play. If you had good training... and the training is what takes over. You almost become like a robot. You do things automatically; you don't even think about them. When you think back, you say, "Gee, did I do that?" Sure, you must have (chuckle). But you're not conscious of it right at that time, I think.

In all the time that I was in the service, I don't actually recall being afraid except for one time. This is

when we thought that a submarine was after us. We were at general quarters, and I was setting up a battle dressing station. It was that period of time when there was nothing; you were just sitting there. All at once you got to thinking, and this is why I can base my statement upon that experience, because I got to thinking, "Gee, what if this happens? What if that happens?" Suddenly I realized that I was scared, and that's the only time that I ever remember being scared at any particular time. Now later on, after it was over with, now that's a different thing--yes, I had time then to be scared.

Marcello: What did you do that evening of December 7?

Jenkins: Of course, we continued setting up--getting our supplies and everything--because, like I say, we had nothing. We worked our tails off, by golly. I think that I got maybe a couple hours of sleep that night.

Marcello: Now was your work being done just about entirely in the battle dressing station?

Jenkins: Yes, in the battle dressing station. We had casualties there. We were taking care of these people and getting them fed and taking care of their wounds and this type of thing.

Here again, the next day we realized, "Look, we got to get some regular battle dressing stations. We got to get supplies sterilized." This was my job, of course, At the

particular time we did not know. That was a period of time when we were, you might say, in limbo. We didn't know what to expect, so we had to expect the worst. So we went ahead with this and set it up.

Marcello: Did you hear very much sporadic gunfire that evening?

Jenkins: Not particularly. Being below decks--we was on the third deck down--we couldn't hear very much like that. I'll tell you about the next night, though--what was going on. I knew then what it was. Anyway, Sunday night and Monday we was busy fixing up our sterile packs and this type of thing, getting everything ready.

On Monday afternoon, probably about five o'clock, I looked at our chief, and I said, "Dolan is tell over on the Oklahoma. Aren't you going to send a relief over?" The chief looked at me, and he said, "Yeah, I guess I'd better send somebody." He said, "I guess it might as well be you." (chuckle) I learned right then to keep my mouth shut after that. Anyway, I said, "Okay, but, Chief, I'm awfully tired." I said, "You know that I've been busy, and I'd appreciate it if you'd be sure to send someone over there to relieve me at midnight--on the relief boat that comes over." He said, "Okay, I'll take care of it."

I went over to the Oklahoma, and there they was sitting up on the bare decks, so I knew what was going on then. You'd hear something fall out in the water every once in awhile.

All at once, I got curious, and I asked one of the workers on the Oklahoma, "What in the heck is that noise I hear out there?" He said, "That's a bullet that's dropping. I got to thinking, and I said, "Wait a minute! Hold it! If a bullet is falling out there, what if one falls here and I'm under it?" (Chuckle) They said, "No, none ever falls here."

So we was going around on the hull tapping...and from the time that I got over there...it was about midnight when we got a tap back. We knew there was still somebody in the hull. By this time they had quit using cutting torches because they had killed some of the fellows. The paint on the other side had caught fire from the heat of the cutting torch, and they asphyxiated some of the men. They was using these diamond bits, and, boy, it would peel that steel off of there just like butter. These fellows...whenever they would get a bit dull, they didn't save them; they just tossed them over the side and reached and got a new one. They cut through that hull, and, of course, a battleship has a double bottom on it, so they cut through the top skin and had to go through the other. It took him...it couldn't have been over an hour, and they was through. They cut about a yard square and pulled out, as far as I know, the last two guys that was pulled out of the bottom.

We put him in the motor launch and put a blanket around him, and we took off for the Solace. One of them

said, "Hey, Doc, what time is it?" I said, "About two-thirty Tuesday morning." They said, "You're kidding! It's only about four or five o'clock in the afternoon!" I said, "Well, you don't see the sun shining, do you?" They had not realized that the this much time had gone by.

As we went by, a minesweeper was tied up right aft of the Arizona. A kid had an itchy trigger finger, and he yelled at us, and then he shot. When he did, I just slid down. One of the guys said, "What's the matter, Doc? That'd be a good, clean death!" And they hadn't even budged an inch (chuckle).

So we got him over to the Solace and checked him in and got a cup of coffee and a cigarette and went back to the Oklahoma. At eight-thirty the next morning, I was still aboard that rascal; no relief had been sent over.

Marcello: Now where were you when you boarded the Oklahoma. Were you actually on a deck or one of the sides or what?

Jenkins: On the bottom of it. It had turned turtle. We was...they was--the yard workmen--cutting through, and, like I say, we got these last two out. If I remember right, it was a carpenter's mate second class and a shipfitter second class. I don't remember their names or anything. In fact, I wrote some notes down later on about my feelings at the time and everything. I think I put down that they were a carpenter's mate second class and a shipfitter second class. As far as

I know...I heard later that there was someone else taken out afterwards, but I know he was not taken out of there by the group that was over there from Monday night until Tuesday morning because the next morning the boat came along, and the guys said, "Well, heck, we might as well secure because there's nobody else on it." We couldn't get any further taps at that time. Like I say, maybe later on they did. But that was the only two that we got out that night from the time I was over there.

I jumped in this relief boat, and I went back to the ship. I was, needless to say, hopping mad. The doctor caught me, and he says, "Go take a shower, get some chow, and go to bed and sleep as long as you want to." While I was taking my shower, a friend of mine brought me a Coke and said, "The doctor put a little something in there for you." It was two ounces of brandy in it (chuckle). I drank that and went to breakfast, and then I went to bed.

Marcello: When did the Rigel finally get out of Pearl?

Jenkins: We left in April of 1942. We had completed our overhaul. They had got everything...really, they worked twenty-four hours a day, and they got the old ship in top-notch shape, and we took off for New Zealand. We took a contingent of American soldiers out of Hawaii to Fanning Island to relieve the garrison of New Zealand soldiers, and we took them on to Auckland, New Zealand. We was the first American ship that was

in Auckland,

On the way down with the contingent of New Zealand soldiers, we had two that had completely lost their skin, and we took care of them. When they brought them aboard, they brought them aboard on stretchers, and we gave them boys twenty-four-hour nursing service, and we had them walking when we got to Auckland, New Zealand.

In the meantime, we had learned something of their customs, something of their money; and so when we got to Auckland we knew a little something about the country. Those people were beautiful. They were just terrific. Being the first ship in there, gosh, by the time we had docked alongside the dock, we had invitations to parties and everything. Those people were sure happy to see these boys coming back. They just opened up their homes and their hearts.

Marcello: Well, that's probably a good place to end this interview, Mr. Jenkins. I want to thank you very much for having participated. You've said some very important and interesting things.

Jenkins: I hope that I shed a little light on this day.

Marcello: I'm sure that scholars and students are going to find your comments quite valuable when they use them to study about Pearl Harbor.

Jenkins: I hope I contributed a little something, anyway (chuckle).