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Interview with

JAMES COOK

November 14, 1987

Place of Interview: Kenner, Louisiana

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: James A. Cook  
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

James Cook

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello      Date: November 14, 1987

Place of Interview: Kenner, Louisiana

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing James Cook for the North Texas State Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on November 14, 1987, in Kenner, Louisiana. I am interviewing Mr. Cook in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was aboard the repair ship USS Rigel during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Cook, to begin this interview, give me a brief biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you born--some information of that nature.

Mr. Cook: Well, I was born in Monroe, Louisiana, on January 27, 1923.

Dr. Marcello: Tell me a little bit about your education.

Mr. Cook: Well, I didn't have too much, but I finally got to the ninth grade in high school. My father was a bricklayer, and he had to follow his trade up and down the East Coast. It was me and two brothers,

and all three of us were in the Navy. One of them retired out the Navy. Times were hard in them days, so we kind of had to quit school to help the family out. I never graduated, but you know how that is (chuckle).

Marcello: When did you join the service?

Cook: Well, I was thinking about that yesterday. I joined the service on June 13, 1941.

Marcello: Why did you decide to join the service?

Cook: Well, I've always thought about the Navy as something nice. I had two brothers already in the Navy, and I wanted to get in, myself. At that time it seemed like the right thing to do.

Marcello: Now most people around that time seemed to have joined for one of two reasons. First of all, there were economics involved. In other words, even though the service didn't pay much, there was a certain amount of security. Then other people joined--especially around the time when you joined--because they didn't want to go into the Army. Selective Service and the draft had started.

Cook: Right. I didn't want to be drafted, and then I wanted to pick my choice of the branch, and the Navy was my choice.

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

Cook: Well, on my first try to get in, I couldn't quite get in

because we had to take a chest expansion examination, and I couldn't expand the two or three or four inches, whatever. I forget what it was; I mean, you're going back a long way, you know. I had to go home and take some chest exercises or something, and the guy told me to come back in a week or two. Finally, I made it. Then for another thing at that time, I had three teeth missing in the front, and they had to send to Washington for a waiver on that because my teeth were going to hold me back.

I wasn't in, really, the U.S. Navy. They finally got around that by putting me in the Reserves. So actually I went in in the U.S. Navy Reserves, but I went through boot camp and everything with the Regular Navy fellows. So we got around it that way, and they got me in (chuckle).

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Cook: San Diego, California.

Marcello: And how long did boot camp last at that time?

Cook: I think at that time it was either six or eight weeks. I kind of forget. I know it was Company 4175. I wish I knew somebody that was still around there because I've only got one picture of that. They had a fire or something that destroyed that big white picture we had with the white uniforms when we graduated. I do have the little small picture in our blue uniforms.

Marcello: You mentioned that boot camp lasted six or eight weeks.

Cook: Something like that, yes. They were kind of rushing us up because I think they knew something was about to break or whatever. I really couldn't say that for sure, you know.

Marcello: Other than the fact that they had reduced the amount of time spent in boot training, was there anything eventful that happened during that period, or was it simply the usual kind of boot camp?

Cook: Well, I really couldn't tell you that because, like I say, I was only sixteen or seventeen years old. I wasn't into politics or nothing. To me, I could care less, I guess (chuckle). I was in the Navy, and I wanted to be there and do my job.

Marcello: Where did you go from boot camp?

Cook: Well, when I got out of boot camp, I think they gave us a thirty-day leave. I went home, you know, to show off my uniform and everything (chuckle). When I came back to San Diego, I boarded the battleship USS Maryland, and from there we went to Hawaii. When I got to Hawaii, I was assigned to this USS Rigel, which was an old four-stack destroyer repair ship or tender, whatever you want to call it.

Marcello: What was your reaction to being assigned to the Hawaiian Islands? Were you looking forward to it?

Cook: Oh, yes, I did. In my younger years, going to school

and everything, I'd heard about the Hawaiian Islands and how beautiful they were. I was thrilled to death to be going to Hawaii (chuckle).

Marcello: You mentioned that you went across on the battleship Maryland, and it was at Pearl Harbor that you picked up the Rigel. Approximately when was it that you went aboard the Rigel? You may have to estimate that date.

Cook: Oh, I'd say approximately August or something like that...the last of August, maybe.

Marcello: August of 1941?

Cook: Right, yes.

Marcello: When you went aboard the Rigel, what was your reaction to going aboard a ship of that nature? You mentioned awhile ago that you were a seventeen- or eighteen-year-old kid; you've just come across the Pacific on one of the glamour ships, a battleship. Now what was your reaction upon being assigned to the Rigel from that standpoint?

Cook: I was kind of disillusioned. They post it up on the bulletin board when you graduate from boot camp as to what ship you're going to be assigned to. At that time I didn't know what the Rigel was, but when I got there and I saw what it was, I was kind of disillusioned because I was kind of looking for a fighting ship or something. After coming out on a battleship and getting over there, I came to look at this thing, and I said,

"Oh, Lord! Is this what I'm going to be on?" (chuckle)  
But, anyway, you've got to take orders.

Marcello: When you went aboard the Rigel, what were your first duties?

Cook: Well, I was an apprentice seaman when I got there...seaman second class. Well, you're an apprentice seaman after you graduate, and then you're automatically a seaman second. I was assigned to the deck force.

Marcello: And what is involved in being in the deck force?

Cook: Well, I was in the deck force, and they have different jobs that they do. My job. I happened to be assigned to the motor pool, which is the motor whaleboats and everything. My boat was a fifty-foot motor launch that we used to carry stores. If we wasn't carrying stores, we'd go to the battleships or someplace and carry liberty parties ashore. A fifty-footer is a pretty big-sized motor launch, you might call it.

Marcello: Would you be a member of a crew of one of those motor launches?

Cook: Yes, I was the crew of it. There was only three of us. There was the coxswain--the guy that drove it--and then we had an engineer or whatever you call it--he was the guy that drove the motor--and I was the bow man that tied it up as we pulled in to the dock or something.

Marcello: How long did you remain on that job aboard the Rigel?

Cook: I stayed on there until I started striking for radioman.



I can't remember when, but I was on there until after the war broke out because. I remember that when the war broke out, they gave us rifles and everything, and we were to stay on our boats wherever we were docked underneath there.

Marcello: Did you strike for radioman during that period before Pearl Harbor attack?

Cook: No, it was after that.

Marcello: So you were actually on that boat crew right up until the time of the attack.

Cook: Right, right, yes.

Marcello: Those repair ships or tenders are kind of fascinating to me. They can do virtually every kind of small ship repair, can they not, and also some major ones?

Cook: Yes, we had all kinds of machine shops on there.

Marcello: What were some of the various skills that one would find aboard a vessel such as the Rigel?

Cook: Well, we had a dentist on there, and, like I say, we had a machine shop. We wasn't servicing the big front line ships. We were servicing those old World War I four-stackers. That's what I call the World War I destroyers. We called them "four-stackers. That's about all I know about it.

Marcello: A lot of times those ships would have foundries, would they not, and optical shops and all sorts of things like that?

Cook: Yes, we did have that. We were like a floating. .I don't know how you would express it, but we had a little bit of everything.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about shipboard life during that pre-Pearl Harbor period. First of all, give me a rundown on your quarters. What were your quarters like aboard the Rigel?

Cook: Well, they were a little cramped because in those days, you know, we had no air conditioning or anything else. So we were kind of a little cramped, and the bunks were on top of one another. They had chains holding them up, and when we'd get out of the bunks, naturally you'd have to fold them up so you'd have room to walk in the passageway. We slept on little thin mattresses. Of course, we had lockers to keep our clothes and stuff in. It wasn't too bad. The chow was good.

Marcello: Where did you take your chow?

Cook: Down in the mess hall.

Marcello: So you had a separate mess aboard the ship?

Cook: Oh, yes, yes. It was what they called the galley down below.

Marcello: Describe the food.

Cook: It was very good. But I'll tell you one thing: we had plenty of pineapples (chuckle), being in Hawaii, you know. It wasn't bad at all; it was pretty good. Potatoes in the morning, potatoes at noon, potatoes at

night, but you get used to it. All in all, it wasn't bad. We were very healthy, and I don't believe anybody complained about it.

Marcello: Awhile ago we were talking about your responsibilities aboard the Rigel. Did you have any other responsibilities other than helping to run that fifty-foot whaleboat? In other words, did you actually get involved in the maintenance and operation of the ship, since you were in the deck force?

Cook: No, no, no. I was strictly on the motor launch.

Marcello: What would you be doing during those periods when the motor launch wasn't actually being used?

Cook: Well, we'd just sort of stand by all the time. When we had time to kill or whatever, the coxswain would get out some paint, and we'd have to scrub the gunwales down and varnish them--just keep it up all the time. It used to make me so mad because we had to wear tennis shoes, being that we were the crew; and then when we'd go pick up these other sailors there to go haul stores or something, they'd be there with their regular shoes and scratch it up. So when the work detail is over: "Clean it up, Cook!" (chuckle)

Marcello: During that period after you went aboard the Rigel, did it remain there in Pearl Harbor right up until the time of the attack, or did it ever.

Cook: Oh, yes.

Marcello: So it did not get out of there while you were on board.

Cook: No, no, we never left port while I was there. We went to what they called the "old coal docks. That's where we were tied up. Then all of a sudden, after a month or two, we went around to the shipyard there, and then the whole superstructure was taken off. We were in for a major overhaul.

Marcello: What were they going to be doing that major overhaul?

Cook: Just rebuild the whole top superstructure. That's why I thought maybe when them Japs came over that they thought we were going to be converted to a carrier because we had no superstructure or nothing. We were just like a ship there with the deck almost leveled. It was rough, I'll tell you that.

Marcello: In the position or condition such as that, where were you getting your power and things of that nature?

Cook: From the dock.

Marcello: You would be getting it from ashore?

Cook: Yes.

Marcello: Once the ship went into that condition, did your function remain the same, that is, did you continue to help man the fifty-foot whaleboat?

Cook: Oh, yes, yes. I stayed on that. .when the attack came, they. .well, I don't know if I should get ahead of myself or not. I stayed on there. .I'll wait for your questions (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay.

Cook: I stayed on there until after we were repaired and were out to sea. Then when we got repaired and left--of course, I'm getting ahead of myself again--we was headed for New Zealand. But that was later.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the liberty procedures aboard the Rigel while you were there at Pearl. How was the liberty organized or arranged?

Cook: It was called port-and-starboard liberty.

Marcello: And what did that mean?

Cook: Well, that means half the ship would go today, and half goes tomorrow (chuckle).

Marcello: So on a weekend, you might possibly have liberty on Saturday and duty on Sunday or the other way around.

Cook: Right.

Marcello: When you had liberty, could you stay overnight?

Cook: No, no. You had to report back at a certain time.

Marcello: And what time was that? Do you recall what time you had to be back?

Cook: Before 8:00 in the morning.

Marcello: Oh, okay, so you could stay overnight as long as you were back at 8:00 in the morning.

Cook: Right. We'd call it overnight, anyway (chuckle).

Marcello: Given your pay, could you afford to stay over very often?

Cook: Well, in those days I guess you could. If I remember

correctly, we got paid on a Friday, and I had liberty Saturday, and I went ashore.

Marcello: This was that weekend of December 7?

Cook: Right. We got paid on Friday, I went ashore Saturday, and, as usual, I had a few...I got kind of high. I came back to the ship sometime, and the next thing I knew, some guy was waking me up in my bunk that morning, saying, "Wake up! Wake up! The Japs are here! They're bombing us!"

Marcello: Okay, we'll get to that portion in a moment.

Cook: Okay.

Marcello: You in part have answered my next question. What did you normally do when you went ashore?

Cook: Well, it depends. You'd go to a show or go to a skating rink or go to Waikiki there and go swimming in the surf. They had different things for you to do there. The people wasn't quite too friendly to servicemen in those days. There was so many of us there, and there was a certain section of town where the sailors and soldiers and Marines would hang out. If I remember, a few of the guys wore civilian clothes, but you were not supposed to.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you would normally also go to bars when you went ashore.

Cook: Oh, yes, yes.

Marcello: Did you have a favorite one?

Cook: No, not really. Maybe I did at that time, but I can't remember that far back.

Marcello: Do you remember a place called the Black Cat Cafe?

Cook: Black Cat Cafe?

Marcello: The Black Cat Cafe was located right across from the YMCA, and it evidently was the first bar that most people went to because I think it was at the YMCA where the busses and taxis let people off.

Cook: Yes, but we usually. .as soon as we got there, we started walking back the other way (chuckle).

Marcello: Of what significance are Hotel and Canal Streets? Do you remember Hotel and Canal Streets?

Cook: Yes.

Marcello: What was the significance of those streets?

Cook: Well, there was a lot of brothels around that area (chuckle), if you want to call them that. What impressed me mostly when I got there was to see these women barbers. There were a lot of women barbers there.

Marcello: And it is not true that a lot of them were Oriental?

Cook: Oh, yes, yes.

Marcello: In fact, they were Japanese, I think, in many cases.

Cook: Yes, Japanese or Chinese. We used to call them "Kanakies.

Marcello: Did you also notice there were a lot of tattoo parlors and curio shops on Hotel and Canal Streets?

Cook: Oh, yes, yes. Would you believe I never got a tattoo?

I never got a tattoo. Tattoo parlors, massage parlors, you name it (chuckle).

Marcello: All kinds of places to take the sailor's money, right?

Cook: That's right.

Marcello: You mentioned a moment ago that you had gotten paid on that Friday, which would be the 5th of December.

Cook: Right.

Marcello: You have a very good memory because I think that a large portion of the fleet did get paid on the fifth and the twentieth, isn't that correct?

Cook: Something like that, yes.

Marcello: Okay, I think this more or less brings us into that weekend of December 7. Again, you were talking a little bit about this previously in the interview. Nevertheless, I'll have you go over some of this again. What did you do on that Saturday of December 6, 1941? Do you recall?

Cook: No, that's kind of hard to say. I know I was on liberty ashore. I just went ashore with the rest of the guys. I couldn't tell you what I did that day. It was just like another normal day then.

Marcello: I suspect that when you were over there getting those changes made in the ship that you would not have had to have taken a liberty boat to get ashore, would you, because you were right on shore?

Cook: No, no, we had to take a liberty boat to go around to



where the taxicabs and the busses came up. That's around by the sub base over there. We were too far away to. .we were almost in the back of the hospital there where the first plane that they claim that they shot down crashed. In fact, I might have seen that thing, but I'm not sure. So much went on that we can't put it all together--you know, split seconds.

Marcello: Do you recall when you came back aboard the Rigel that Saturday evening?

Cook: No, because, like I say, I was pretty well "four sheets to the wind, as you might say (chuckle)

Marcello: You mentioned that you were somewhat inebriated when you came back.

Cook: Right.

Marcello: Was this more or less the general rule for most people that came back aboard on a Saturday, or would that simply vary from individual to individual?

Cook: It varied, yes. Some of them didn't drink at all, and some of them drank excessively. There was a mixture, you know.

Marcello: Okay, so you come back, and you hit the sack. What was going to be your routine on Sunday, assuming that there hadn't been an attack? Would you have had the duty?

Cook: Yes, I just had to go stand by on the boat, that's all.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into the Sunday morning of December 7, so we want to go into this in as much detail as you

can remember. I'll let you recount the story as best you remember it from the time you initially woke up on that Sunday morning.

Cook: Well, you want me to start from when I was woke up?

Marcello: That's correct, yes.

Cook: Well, I was sleeping, and one of my shipmates came and shook me very vigorously and woke me up and said, "Get up! Get up! Quick! The Japs are bombing us!"

Marcello: Now the initial attack occurred, so far as we can tell, around 7:55 a.m. On a Sunday morning, did you not have to be up at a particular time?

Cook: No, not on there. I was in the boat detail, and I wasn't like the clean and sweep-down crew that has to get up and clean. They blow a whistle: "Clean and Sweep Down. In fact, I might have been off that day. I don't remember. You're going back too far, you know (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, so your shipmate shakes you and wakes you up.

Cook: Right.

Marcello: What do you do at that stage?

Cook: Well, I jumped down from my bunk, and the first thing I did was run topside to see what he was talking about.

Marcello: So you're in your skivvy shorts?

Cook: Right. I didn't get dressed. I ran topside, and I'm looking around, and all I can see is a lot of bombs and noise and everything going on. I looked over to my

right, and here comes this airplane. He couldn't have been fifty or sixty feet off the water.

Marcello: What did you see?

Cook: I seen a Jap airplane coming in. He looked over at me, and he grinned. I could see his white teeth. I couldn't believe it, you know. I just couldn't believe it. So about that time, the boatswain's mate ordered everybody below deck.

Marcello: In the meantime, has General Quarters ever sounded?

Cook: No, we didn't have general quarters.

Marcello: Okay.

Cook: They ordered everybody below deck because so much was going on. Well, what we did, we went below deck, but I was kind of curious. I sneaked back up when he wasn't around (chuckle), and I got back up on topside, and I started looking over toward Battleship Row.

Marcello: And what did you see?

Cook: I seen three or four big water spouts go up on the Oklahoma. I stayed up there long enough to watch her start going over, and it looked like it just went over in slow motion, just as slow as could be.

About that time, like I say, bombs was bursting all around you. Boy, I heard something hit about two feet from me. When I looked around, there was a piece of shrapnel. In them days I didn't know what shrapnel was. You know, I've got that piece today. I kept it as a

souvenir.

Marcello: How large is it?

Cook: It's about two or three inches. I don't know what it is, but I've got it to this day. It hit about from here to that wall, I guess (gesture). When that hit, I said, "You know something? I'd better get back down below before I get hit or something!"

Marcello: That shrapnel is heavy, and it's jagged, isn't it?

Cook: Yes. I've got it now; I've got it at home. It's about that long (gesture). I don't know what it is--if it's a bomb fragment or another piece of fragment from a ship or something. I really don't know. I'd like to have it analyzed someday.

Marcello: But this is about, oh, maybe three or four inches around?

Cook: No, it's not round. It's kind of jagged-like.

Marcello: Yes, a mass. It's a mass of metal, I guess.

Cook: No, it's long. Like I say, it's about that long, about as big around.

Marcello: What I'm trying to establish here is. .see, when you make gestures, we can't get that on tape (chuckle).

Cook: Oh (chuckle)! Well, it's about as long as my index finger and about as round as that.

Marcello: Okay, fine.

Cook: It's as long as my index finger and just about as round as that. Like you say, it's jagged.

Marcello: And it landed maybe about two or three feet from you?

Cook: I heard it hit the boat landing right next to me, and when I looked down, I picked it up, and then I came to realize what shrapnel was. See, I didn't know what shrapnel was before in my life. Then I really got scared, so I went back down below. They said, "Stay down below, because they were strafing and bombs were flying and everything else."

Marcello: By this time, have you put on some clothing?

Cook: No, I still was in my skivvies. I was too busy wanting to look around and see. I don't know why I didn't want to get dressed right away. Later, I went back down. I thought, "You know, I better go get dressed! I guess maybe a half-hour later, they called our boats away to go out to help survivors. So at that time, I wasn't quite dressed. It was another fellow who said, "Cook, I'm going in your place while you go get dressed!" I said, "Well, I'm going to be right there!" He said, "No, never mind, man! We're in a hurry!" So they left, and about ten minutes later they came back, and they were soaking wet. I said, "What happened?" He said, "Man, they dropped a 500-pound bomb right off the bow of our ship!" But it didn't explode. It went through one of the boats and down in the mud. I think about a week or two later or something, they sent divers down there and retrieved it. So that put a hole in one of the

boats there, and we couldn't get the rest of them out or something. So our boats were tied up, and we couldn't get out to go try to help rescue them. But I think one or two managed to get out. Then .heck, I don't know. Everything was in such confusion and uproar that you didn't know whether you were coming or going. We were running around like chickens with their heads cut off.

Marcello: So what did you do, then, at that point? What were you personally doing?

Cook: Just standing underneath until the attack was over. Then after the attack was over, we went and got our boat and went out. The first thing we did, we headed for the area of the Oklahoma.

Marcello: Okay, now you're in your fifty-footer?

Cook: Yes, right.

Marcello: And there's a crew of how many in there now?

Cook: Well, there's about four of us in there now.

Marcello: First of all, describe how far away Battleship Row is from where you were located.

Cook: Actually, about half a mile or a little better.

Marcello: Was it a pretty clear shot?

Cook: Yes.

Marcello: Next describe what the condition of the water was as you were going from the Rigel over toward the Oklahoma.

Cook: Oily, full of oil. It was oily as heck.

Marcello: When you say it was oily, can you be a little more

specific?

Cook: Well, fuel was coming up from the ships that had capsized--the Arizona, I guess, and the other ships. They had put the fires out on the oil. Well, not completely out, but enough that a ship could get in to the Oklahoma that was capsized.

Marcello: Was the water full of debris and everything else?

Cook: No, not really, because everything was metal and it sunk right away. There was not much wood floating around. It was just oily and mucky and thick and slippery.

Marcello: And this is a thick oil, is it not?

Cook: Yes, it was diesel oil or whatever they used in those ships.

Marcello: Okay, so you're on your way from the Rigel over toward the Oklahoma.

Cook: Right.

Marcello: Describe what you do and what happened.

Cook: Well, we got to the Oklahoma, and we could hear tapping inside there. There was some men trapped underneath down there. I remember they had sent back word real quick, and we lowered some oxygen bottles down through some kind of a hole there--I guess it was an air vent hole--to give them oxygen down there.

Marcello: These are people inside the Oklahoma?

Cook: Right, they were trapped down in there when she capsized. They were in, like, an air pocket, I guess,

but they were running out of oxygen down there. So we kept dropping these CO<sub>2</sub> bottles, I guess you'd call them--oxygen bottles.

Marcello: Had they been loaded on your whaleboat before you left?

Cook: No, no, no. We didn't know that until we got over there and we hear the tapping.

Marcello: Okay, then what happened?

Cook: Well, somehow or other, I guess they sent word back to somebody to bring some oxygen over there. You could hear them talking down there.

Marcello: You could hear them talking through the ship?

Cook: Yes, just faintly, you know.

Marcello: Now by that time, did they already have holes drilled in the ship?

Cook: Oh, no, no. They didn't do that until the next day.

Marcello: Okay, so you hear the tapping, and the call goes out for these oxygen bottles. So then what do you do?

Cook: Well, all we can do is just stand by. I think we went back and got a bunch of welding machines and stuff and brought them back over there when they started cutting through the deck to try to get them out. I think they got a few of them out, but a few of them, I think, got killed in there because when we were cutting through there the paint inside caught on fire and it burnt them up. It was just one of those things that happened, you know. When they started cutting through there with



acetylene torches, it caused a fire in there, and the paint caught on fire, and I think they burned a few of them up. It was just one of those things that we couldn't help.

Marcello: I'm still a little confused about those oxygen bottles. You hear the tapping, and the people trapped inside the Oklahoma are yelling that they are running out of oxygen.

Cook: Yes.

Marcello: The word goes out to bring over these oxygen bottles.

Cook: Yes, right.

Marcello: But your crew actually didn't go and get any of these oxygen bottles.

Cook: No, no, no.

Marcello: Okay, somebody else went and brought them over.

Cook: They had to get a faster boat because the fifty-footer I got was a slow-moving thing.

Marcello: What I don't understand is, how did they get those oxygen bottles down to the trapped men.

Cook: They tied a string on them and lowered them down--a long rope or something, you know. They lowered them down there. How they got them from wherever they lowered them to, I don't know.

Marcello: But in order to do that, they must have drilled some holes or something.

Cook: No, it was a hole already there. Like I say, it must have been maybe some kind of a vent hole--a toilet vent

hole--or God knows what. I'm not an engineer (chuckle)  
I knew they put them on a string, and they lowered them  
down there, and whoever was down there got them. Now I  
wasn't actually on there when they finally got them out  
because we were shifting back and forth and everything.

Marcello: So this hole that they were dropping these oxygen  
bottles down must have been about six or eight inches in  
diameter?

Cook: Yes, but not big enough for a human to come out of.

Marcello: Okay, so you're standing by over there. What else can  
you do? Or what else are you doing?

Cook: Just standing by and just waiting to see what goes next;  
taking orders from the officers and just standing by.

Marcello: And how long did you stand by there?

Cook: Oh, all day, I imagine, until darkness or whatever.

Marcello: Did you not take part in any of the activities involved  
in searching for the wounded or survivors out in the  
water or bodies or anything like that?

Cook: No, no. They had other ships out there that were doing  
that.

Marcello: Do you remember anything else with regard to what was  
taking place over there at the Oklahoma? I'm referring  
to the people tapping on the bottom of the ship or  
anything like that. What was your impression when you  
came up and saw this huge ship that had been turned  
over?

Cook: Well, I'm going to tell you the God's truth. I was scared. Anybody who tells you they wasn't scared, they're either crazy or they're lying. I believe anybody who was there that day was scared to a certain point, you know, and then after you get over that being scared, you get mad.

Marcello: When did they start bringing out the cutting torches to see if they could rescue those people? Was it that same afternoon?

Cook: Now that I really couldn't say. I really don't remember that. I just remember walking on the hull there and hearing them. .you know, tapping there. I remember they sent for oxygen bottles to put down oxygen there to them. I think they were running out of oxygen bottles when they decided to start cutting. They only had so many of those bottles. I think they were about like a. .I guess you'd call it a fire extinguisher nowadays. I think they was about to run out of those oxygen bottles when they decided to start cutting. If I remember, they cut into one of the compartments there, and from the paint on the inside and the torch, it caught on fire. I think the fumes or something suffocated or burnt some of them up. But as far as I remember, they did get a few out.

Marcello: What size hole were they cutting in the bottom of the ship? Do you remember?

Cook: No, I really don't remember because, you know, we couldn't all gather around there. I imagine it was about the size of your table there or just big enough for a person to get out.

Marcello: In the meantime, describe what the atmosphere and so on is like around there. Obviously, you have all these ships on fire.

Cook: Yes. Well, it was just like a turmoil with everybody running around like a chicken with their head cut off. Everybody was trying to do what they can and as much as they can in just an orderly way. Nobody got panicked or anything--nobody that I know of. But like I say, it was too much to pinpoint any one thing. Everybody just pitched in all at once.

Marcello: I talked to a Pearl Harbor survivor earlier today, and he recalls that when his ship was getting out of the harbor, the fires and the heat was so intense over there at Battleship Row that he could actually feel the heat as the ship went past. Again, it wasn't an uncomfortable sort of thing, but he could feel the heat as far as 500 feet away.

Cook: I believe him. I believe him.

Marcello: What other damaged ships did you get a chance to observe while you were there at the Oklahoma?

Cook: Well, I saw them all.

Marcello: For instance, describe what you saw when you looked over

there at the Arizona.

Cook: Oh, it was a mess, I'll tell you. It looked like every battleship they had there was either damaged or sunk.

Marcello: Can you remember the Arizona specifically?

Cook: Yes, I can remember the Arizona. It was so covered with smoke and everything that you couldn't see anything for about a day after. First, they said they dropped a bomb down the smokestack, and it blew up. But I read articles later that said it hit a forward magazine and blew up, so you're going to hear all kinds of stories.

Marcello: Were you below deck when the Arizona did blow up?

Cook: I must have been because I don't remember seeing it. The only thing I remember seeing actually was the Oklahoma going over. It was just like it rolled over in slow motion. I can see it like I saw it yesterday, you know. I couldn't believe what I was looking at. What really got me...I couldn't understand. .before, everytime those battleships would come in, they would put a torpedo net around them, but for some reason they didn't have no torpedo nets around them on December 7. In fact, they had discontinued doing that for a while. Why, I don't know. I was not "in the know.

Marcello: Do you think it was in part because of the fact that there were so many ships in that harbor?

Cook: No, because they used to always do that when the battleships came in--I mean, when I first got to Pearl

in August and September. Everytime they'd come in there and they'd dock, they'd have the torpedo net put around in front of them. But for some reason they discontinued doing that, and to this day I don't know why. Maybe the big brass knows.

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

Cook: Well, that evening we were ordered to sleep in our boat--to stand by. Like I said, they issued us an old Springfield rifle. They were more or less worried about saboteurs around there. We were ordered to stay and sleep in our boat with this old Springfield rifle and just stand by in case they needed us to do anything.

Marcello: Was the boat over there by the Rigel, or was it still by the Oklahoma?

Cook: No, we were by the Rigel.

Marcello: How much sleep did you get that night?

Cook: Not too much. I was too scared to sleep.

Marcello: Had you eaten at all that day?

Cook: Well, come to think about it, I don't know if I did or not (chuckle). I think we were too busy to eat.

Marcello: What did you guys talk about that night when you were there in the boat? What did you talk about?

Cook: I really don't remember, but I know we were scared.

Marcello: What kind of rumors were floating around?

Cook: Well, the rumors were floating around that they might invade us, you know; that they had some troopships out

there and were going to come in and invade us. Boy, we were really getting shook up!

Marcello: Did you believe most of those rumors?

Cook: At that time, I think I kind of did.

Marcello: You had no reason to believe otherwise after you saw what happened!

Cook: Yes, yes, right. After I saw what damage they did, I figured, "Well, if they wanted, they could have taken Pearl Harbor. But I don't believe they could have held it. They might have made a landing, but I don't think they could have held it. They'd have had to have the whole Japanese army there to hold on to it. They might have made a landing, but I don't think they would have stayed there too long.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you were given this rifle and ammunition in case there would be any possible sabotage. Who was going to commit the sabotage?

Cook: Well, we didn't know, but everybody was trigger-happy. Nobody had better have made a wrong move (chuckle)

Marcello: Of course, I'm sure they thought that some of the Japanese who lived on the island might possibly be saboteurs.

Cook: Well, like I say, we were in there for a major overhaul in the shipyard, and we didn't have but a few civilian workers coming and going all the time. Of course, on a Sunday they worked there. But I don't know. They just

wasn't taking precautions. They had already caught us flatfooted once, and we wasn't going to be caught again.

Another thing I was going to tell you earlier is that during the attack, after it had kind of like a lull in it, we did have two old .30-caliber Lewis guns from World War I. We set them up and came to find out we had no ammunition. I was supposed to be a loader for one of them. We had no ammunition, so the guy in charge there said, "That's all right. If they come back, you just point it at them and make out like you got something. (chuckle) I got a kick out of that. .well, not a kick, but. .I was scared, and I thought, "Man, we're standing up here with no ammunition and point this gun at a plane coming at us?" But that was his orders. I'll never forget that. He had us put two old Lewis guns up there, and then we came to find out we had no ammunition aboard (chuckle)

Marcello: How safe was it to walk around on the dock that evening?

Cook: Well, I wouldn't go walking around on the dock. Like I say, I was in my boat--on the launch there--so I really didn't go walking around. Not that I cared to (chuckle)!

Marcello: Could you hear scattered gunshots all night?

Cook: No, not really, not that I remember. I think that night we shot down three of our own planes coming in.

Marcello: Do you remember that incident?



Cook: I remember when the planes came in, and, boy, it looked like every ship in Battleship Row opened up on them. We came to find out that they were our own planes coming in. Like I say, everybody was trigger-happy, and anything that made noise like an airplane was going to get shot at.

Marcello: You are, of course, referring to those unfortunate planes that were coming in off the Enterprise.

Cook: Yes, yes, right.

Marcello: They evidently had failed to give proper identification, I guess, or perhaps somebody would have unloaded on them anyhow, regardless.

Cook: Right. Anything that looked like an airplane was going to get shot at (chuckle).

Marcello: What did the sky look like when everybody opened up?

Cook: Oh, it looked like the Fourth of July, you might say. But it didn't last too long because they must have got them right away or something. It didn't last too long, but, I guarantee you, I think every ship in the harbor opened up on them.

Marcello: What did you do the next day?

Cook: Well, the next day, like I say, we ferried back and forth to the Oklahoma, and that went on for, oh, maybe three or four days, I guess.

Marcello: And what were you doing? You were taking the welding equipment and so on out there?

Cook: Right, that and bringing lunches or something over there, and officers to inspect it and look at it. We were just following orders.

Marcello: I guess the people aboard the Rigel would have had a direct interest in the Oklahoma since you were a repair ship. Now normally, you obviously repaired destroyers and so on, but still you could lend some assistance over there, I guess.

Cook: Well, there wasn't much you could do to the Oklahoma because she was upside down. But as far as the other ships, I guess the machine shop could have helped them; but, like I say, we was in there for a major overhaul, and I think both of our machine shops was inoperative. The machine shops were all below decks, and that was a different division than mine. I was in the deck force, and the machinist's outfit was somewhere else, so I really don't know how to answer that.

Marcello: In the meantime, what is being done to make the Rigel seaworthy? What are they doing aboard the Rigel?

Cook: Well, they were redoing the whole superstructure, like I said. We were putting on a new bridge, and it was just a general overhaul. We had been tied up there at the coal docks I don't know how long before I went aboard it. They were just getting it remodeled. I don't guess that they were going to leave or anything. It was just that time of the year or whatever. She was an old ship.

I think our top speed was about twelve knots or thirteen knots or something (chuckle).

Marcello: When did they get it seaworthy again?

Cook: It wasn't too long after that--I'd say another two months or something like that. With these other ships there--the main ships--they kind of slowed down working on us. Everybody was concentrating on the battleships and cruisers and what-have-you, and they kind of slowed down on us. I might have it at home in my records or something, but it was a good while after that before we got out to sea.

Marcello: Was it a period of months before you left?

Cook: Oh, yes, yes.

Marcello: And once the Rigel was seaworthy and once you left, where did you go?

Cook: We went to Auckland, New Zealand.

Marcello: And what was your purpose in being sent over there? To serve the same sort of function?

Cook: Yes, right, right. I think we were just like a standby ship over there, because that was during the time that they was getting ready for that Guadalcanal invasion. We were getting down there to bring supplies and things. Of course, after that, we wasn't a four-stack repair ship anymore. We would take anything--cruisers and .well, we didn't have no battleships, but mostly just the more modern destroyers and cruisers or whatever

was needing to be fixed. I think on the way to New Zealand, that's when I got out of the motor pool, and I went striking in the radio gang. I was a radioman then for the rest of the war.

Marcello: Did you remain aboard the Rigel?

Cook: Oh, no, no. I stayed aboard the Rigel until after we left Auckland, New Zealand. We went to New Caledonia, and while we were there, I heard about the Battle of Santa Cruz, I believe it was. My brother was on the Hornet, and I had heard that the Hornet got sunk. I had asked my communications officer there--because he knew what was going on, I guess, from reading codes and whatever--and he told me that the Hornet wasn't sunk. I told him, "I want to transfer off of here! I want to get on a fighting ship!" And this and that and the other, you know. So about a week or two later, they just couldn't keep it a secret any longer. He said, "Yes, the Hornet was sunk. By the way, my brother was on the Hornet when Doolittle made his raid on Tokyo.

So that went on for a good while, and then one day a sub chaser pulled up alongside us. It was PC-479, and they needed a radioman. Well, I was just a third class radioman then, and they needed a radioman. So I asked my boss or whatever you want to call him there, "How about getting me a transfer to this thing?" He said, "Okay, Cook. He knew I wanted to get in a fighting

ship or something. So I stayed on that PC for, oh, a good while. Then I think I got to come back to the States on the point system or something like that. After you're over there for so long, you get to come back to the States through the point system.

I got off the PC, and I came back to the States for a thirty-day leave, and then I went back. I put a ship in commission in Seattle, Washington. It was CVE. That's one of those "jeep" carriers. Well, I stayed on there until we got hit by a kamikaze there in Leyte Gulf. After we got hit, that's where I lost all of my clothes and everything. Boy, I'll never forget. That one and Pearl Harbor were the two closest calls I ever had in the war. I had a few in between, but Pearl Harbor on December 7 and the time that kamikaze got us were the two closest calls I ever had. My battle station was right underneath the bridge on this "jeep" carrier.

Marcello: Do you recall the name of that "jeep" carrier?

Cook: Oh, yes, Kadashan Bay, CDE-76. Five of them came at us, and we knocked four of them down; but the fifth one got through, and he blew a hole in us a size bigger than this room, I believe.

Marcello: So this room is approximately fifteen by twenty feet or something like that?

Cook: Well, that's about the size of the hole he blew in us--

right at the waterline. Like I say, my battle station was right underneath the bridge, and he kept diving for the bridge. But as they were shooting at him, he kept dropping. I was about five feet under the bridge, and he hit five feet under where I was, or else I wouldn't be here today. I remember sitting there in my station copying, and the next thing I knew, I found myself on the other side of the bulkhead over there. It sounded like a 5-inch shell went off. They said we had been hit. Anyway, we never lost a man, though. Everybody was topside at their battle stations. I looked over the side, and I seen all the mattresses and pillow cases and clothing and everything just going on down the way there. He happened to hit right in my locker room there, and I lost all the clothes I had. I lost all my souvenirs and stuff. Well, I did salvage some of my stuff because in our lockers you pack your clothes real tight because you don't have that much room. So I had packed them real tight in there, and I had some pictures and stuff in there. I've got them today. They're waterlogged. When we got back, we went to a place called Tacloban in the Philippines, and they pumped it out, and I got the sight off that Jap planes that crashed into us. I got his gun sight. I found that in there, and that is a souvenir.

After that I was transferred to the Ticondaroga, and

that was a front line carrier. I was in the flag then-- Commander Carrier Division Two or something like that-- under Admiral Spruance. I stayed on there until the end of the war.

Marcello: It has to be a rather unsettling experience--to make an understatement--to come under one of those kamikaze attacks because we're talking about some men that want to live against a man who wants to die.

Cook: Well, I'll tell you, it didn't make no sense to me. In fact, I had heard about kamikazes, and I remember one day three of us carriers were steaming down to. .I think it was Luzon Bay there or someplace in the China Sea. I was off duty, I guess, because I was up topside on the deck, and all of a sudden, I seen a destroyer there to the port of us or whatever you want to call it. This one destroyer out there started shooting up in the sky like crazy, you know. We was at no battle stations or nothing--just cruising along there on a nice sunshiny day. All of a sudden this destroyer starts cutting loose up there, and I think, "What is he shooting at?" Then I seen these two planes coming like this (gestures), and, boy, they're coming like this, and all of a sudden, they turn like that (gestures), and, boy, it was just full throttle down.

Marcello: In other words, they were flying side by side, and then they dive.

Cook: Yes. They was coming like this (gesture), and, boy, they just turned over like that (gesture), and they dove straight down at this carrier--the next one over from us. Well, we wasn't under a zigzag course; we were going straight. If we had been under a zigzag course. I figured this guy was thinking, "If I don't get him, this guy will. But it looked like nobody had seen them because they came out of the blue, out of nowhere. Anyway, they both splashed down on each side of the bow, and I said, "Well, there's two good ones! Two men lost and two planes!

Marcello: Were they shot down, or did they simply crash before they could hit a ship?

Cook: No, no, they just dove into the water before they hit anything. No, they just came up there like that, and, boy, they turned like that, and they just dove straight down; and then one went on this side of the bow (gesture), and the other went on that side (gesture). I guess they figured that if they started zigzagging, this guy would get him; if they went that way, this guy would get him. They didn't get nothing.

Marcello: When did you get out of the service?

Cook: On November 19, 1945, I believe--somewhere around there.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Cook, that's probably a pretty good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for giving me your comments. You've said a lot of



interesting and important things.

Cook: Oh, I could tell you a lot of war stories, but I don't want to go into detail or you'd be here all day and all night. We had a few experiences on that sub chaser there.

Marcello: Well, we got the essence of your experiences at Pearl Harbor, and, of course, that's what we're here to get. Again, I want to thank you very much.

Cook: Well, I hope I can be of service to you.