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Interview with
W. M. CRAWFORD
May 16, 1982

Place of Interview: Austin, Texas

Interviewer: R. E. Marcello

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Approved:

W. M. Crawford
(Signature)

Date:

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Oral History Collection

W, M. Crawford

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E, Marcello

Place of Interview: Austin, Texas

Date: May 16, 1982

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing W, M, Crawford for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 16, 1982, in Austin, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Crawford in order to get his reminscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the battleship USS California during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Crawford, 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. Crawford: I was born in Ripley, Mississippi, on June 15, 1919, making me now sixty-three years old the fifteenth of next month. I'm married...my second marriage. I have three children by my first marriage. My previous wife is deceased. I remarried again, and I have children now who are two, four, seventeen, and nineteen. I live in Lubbock, Texas, and my wife is a

schoolteacher. I'm retired, and I stay home with the children, which seems to keep me young.

Marcello: When did you enter the Navy?

Crawford: I entered the Navy on August 31, 1940.

Marcello: Why did you decide to join the Navy in 1940?

Crawford: Well, you know, there was talk at that time of the draft, and many of the young men in my hometown had joined the Navy and had come back on "boot" leave. It seemed to me that the Navy was the most glamorous sort of thing, and to be entirely honest, I left a small town that had just gone through a Depression; and I had never knew very much in the way of worldly possessions, and I thought I was going to get out of that town and try to make something of myself, regardless of what branch of service that I had to join to get out of there. I'd never been away from home very often. There was about seven other men who were to go with me to the Naval Training Station in San Diego, and at the last moment all seven of them were rejected, so it was a kind of a lonely trip. I went by myself to San Diego, California.

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

Crawford: Very difficult. In fact, these other friends of mine who were turned down were turned down, say, for instance, because a tooth might be out of place, or he might be missing a tooth--almost any little thing you would think of; I mean, you almost had to be a

perfect specimen back then, and you had to be one as of the day that you signed and caught the train out.

Marcello: How long did boot camp last at the time you went through?

Crawford: Boot camp was, I believe, six weeks. It was either six weeks or three months; I'm not certain.

Marcello: I know that at one time it was three months, and then later on it was cut back.

Crawford: Yes, I believe it was three months at the time I went in.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened in boot camp that you think we need to get as part of the record, or was it the normal Navy boot camp?

Crawford: It was just a normal Navy boot camp. I guess nothing happened except I was the right guidon because I was tall. I was always the right guidon, and I didn't know my left foot from my right foot. I had a terrific reaction to the shots that were given, and I passed out a couple of times out in the hot San Diego sun. But other than that, it was very uneventful.

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

Crawford: I would say that I was probably as well read or better than the average person because I was always scanning and reading every piece of newspaper, any periodical, I could get my hands on. It seemed to me that, at my age, especially, I had my pulse well on the world events at that time.

Marcello: When you thought of the country getting into war, were your eyes turned more toward Europe or toward Asia?

Crawford: Actually, I suppose, as far as I can recall, toward Asia and that area,

Marcello: Why was that? I guess the reason I ask that question is because the war had already started in Europe,

Crawford: Right. It was my belief that at that time that it would escalate, and it was just a passing thought that it would be escalating in that area rather than in Europe. I considered Europe in ally, you know, most of the European countries,

Marcello: Where did you go after you got out of boot camp?

Crawford: I went aboard a destroyer at San Diego, and from there I went to Long Beach, California, and I boarded the USS Saratoga for the trip across to Honolulu. We arrived in Honolulu, and I was assigned to the battleship California.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of going to the Hawaiian Islands on a more or less permanent basis?

Crawford: Oh, I thought that was the greatest thing in the world. I figured that I couldn't have gone to any better place, as far as I was concerned,

Marcello: Why was that?

Crawford: Well, I'd heard all these exotic things, and I was a little country boy, and I'd never been to any place like that, so just the idea...I was waiting all along with eager anticipation as we crossed the Pacific. In fact, I recall, at that time it

took about seven or eight days to go across, especially on a battleship, maybe a little less on the carrier. I'm not sure.

Marcello: When you got out of boot camp, did you request a battleship, or were you simply assigned to the California?

Crawford: I was simply assigned to the California; I did not request... I don't recall us having any say-so in whether or not we transferred. It was kind of pot-luck, I thought, wherever I was assigned.

Marcello: What were your thoughts about going aboard a battleship such as the California?

Crawford: At that time I thought there'd be more safety. To me, personally, if I was on a bigger ship, in the event of war, I would possibly have more opportunity being on a battleship than I would being on a smaller craft.

Marcello: When you initially went aboard the California, what kind of a reception did you get? After all, you were still basically a "boot."

Crawford: Well, the reception that we got, we were just...I felt we were just...you were strictly a "boot," and that was it; I mean, there was just absolutely no other description for it. You were just one of the new men that happened to come in from San Diego and be attached to the ship. Certainly, we received no special treatment, or as far as I recall, no special instructions or anything else. I remember they put a pretty close tab on us,

and from the time I walked on that ship until I left it, I was always deathly afraid of those boatswain's mates (chuckle) and the master-at-arms. It seemed like on our particular ship,,.and I heard another survivor from the California explain yesterday that to him they were just big, kind of ape-like gorillas (chuckles).

Marcello: Where were you assigned when you went aboard the California?

Crawford: I was assigned to the Third Division, which was the deck division.

Marcello: This is normal procedure, is it not, to be assigned to the deck division when one goes aboard a ship for the first time?

Crawford: Right, I believe that at that time the division officers of the other units kind of looked you over, kind of like the rookie baseball try-out camp. They looked over the material to see who they felt to be best suited for their particular division. Sometimes, of course, you requested, You did the same thing, too; you looked around and then you picked up on what you'd like to be in or what might enhance your future better.

Marcello: What particular rate did you wish to strike for?

Crawford: At first, I really didn't know, but after I became a seaman first class, I believe, I wanted to strike for storekeeper, and I requested a transfer to the "S" Division and was granted that.

Marcello: When did that occur?

Crawford: I believe I must have struck for storekeeper about shortly after

the first of the year. I wasn't in the deck division, I don't think, over three months or so.

Marcello: Talk a little bit about your living quarters aboard the California. What were they like?

Crawford: Well, I guess the best way to describe it,,they were very, very close quarters by necessity, with hanging bunks, I believe, either two or three deep at that time alongside of each other in a rather small compartment. There wasn't any (chuckle) opportunity to store much luggage anywhere or any of that type of gear that you might have along. It had lockers; they were very compact. Of course, you had to go through the instruction on how to store all your clothes in there, and sometimes your locker might be in your individual compartment, and sometimes, as a matter of necessity, it might be off in another compartment removed from the compartment you were in. That made the complement, at least in my part of the ship...you had a very close relationship with your friends. You're in close proximity to your (chuckle) closest friends.

Marcello: So from what you say, then, I gather that you were not swinging a hammock aboard the California when you were there.

Crawford: No, I had many opportunities to swing in a hammock. In fact, many times when you'd have the duty or were assigned a watch out on the main deck at night, you were supposed to come up on what we called the main deck and swing your hammock and stay in it. But because of my height, I always had difficulty because I could hardly...

it was the most uncomfortable position in the world, I tell you (chuckle). I would take the alternatives, and I don't believe that I ever slept in a hammock one night during my tour of duty.

Marcello: What was the food like aboard the California?

Crawford: The food aboard the California, I thought, was real good, especially after you'd been on there for a while. Of course, if you were down, say, at the wrong end of the table, and you didn't have a good mess cook, a major portion of the food would be gone before it gets down to you (chuckle). You could get the short rations. But if you had a good cook who could run up to the galley real fast...and we used to tip him a dollar or two each payday--each of us--so he would always hurry up a little more. In fact, back then the most money I ever made during my entire Navy career was during the few weeks that I was a mess cook because of the tips I got. I made more out of that than when I was a chief petty officer.

Generally speaking, I thought the food was very good. Of course, I was prejudiced. By that time, I was involved in the care of the G.S.K. storerooms, they called them, and I was in charge of going over to Merry's Landing and picking up all the fresh provisions for the ship. They'd always been pre-ordered; I'd just go over to the Navy man over there in a liberty launch and bring back all the fresh supplies for the ship.

Marcello: In general, as you look back upon life aboard that California

prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, how would you describe the morale of you and your shipmates? In other words, was it a happy ship?

Crawford: I would say so. There was a few people who were naturally always wanting to go back to stateside and wondering when we were going to make another trip back to the continental limits. The time that I was aboard, which was approximately about a year and three months prior to the attack, I believe we went back on two different occasions. In fact, as I recall, we came back from Long Beach about in November before the attack occurred on the seventh of December. We'd returned from Long Beach, California. So I would consider the morale, as far as everyone I knew, at least the people that I knew their names and faces...I knew most of them aboard ship...we really didn't get to know them that well. I felt the morale, as far as I'm concerned, was excellent.

Marcello: How do you account for the high morale?

Crawford: I would say because of the good treatment that...for instance, it was always my theory that the crew was, in a lot of cases, similar to the treatment you received from, for instance, the executive officer and the commanding officer. Our executive at that time was a Commander Carney, who later became, I believe, Admiral of the Fleet--Rear Admiral Robert B. Carney. I recall going down in his cabin on more than one occasion to ask him for a three-day pass. He was always very courteous to me and never did turn that request down. Of course, like any Navy ship,

when you had a change of command and you had a new captain, sometimes he probably didn't understand our...or you couldn't get along as well with that captain as maybe you could with the previous commanding officer, so in the passageways you'd tend to avoid (chuckle) running into him. You know, you'd have to salute in the first place, and then all of a sudden they were right up on you before you even knew it. So I just tried to stay away from them as much as I could. Also, there were many cases when I couldn't because one of my cleaning stations aboard the California was to clean the big, three-star bronze plaque of Vice Admiral William Satterly Pye. I remember his name until today. He was the admiral aboard ship, and in Navy terminology he was Commander, COMBATDIV 2, meaning Commander, Battleship Division Two, and he carried his flag aboard our ship.

Marcello: Let's talk about one of the typical training exercises in which the California would engage after it got to Pearl Harbor. For example, when would the California normally go out on one of its training exercises, what would it do when it went out, and how long would it stay out?

Crawford: I don't recall, with any exception during the length of time that I was aboard the California, that we didn't go out normally on Monday, Monday morning--just like a Monday through Friday--on our out-to-sea job. We'd go out usually in a convoy, an armada of ships, as it were. A normal week would be...we'd carry two

to three aircraft, and many times we'd have dummy bombing and strafing runs, practice in trying to hit sleds that were towed behind us. We would practice gunnery with the big 16-inch guns, with destroyers pulling targets behind them.

We'd practice launching and retrieving aircraft shot off of a catapult at about, at that time, eighty miles an hour, with a big shell-like thing. I believe it contained 80 percent glycerin and 20 percent distilled water, which was a very potent thing. The pilot was shot off, and later we'd turn in order to make the water as smooth as possible and throw a sea sled over the side with a crane. Then his pontoons would catch on this sea sled, and then it'd be hoisted up. I recall that it always used to amaze me. I don't think they ever had but one man capsize while bringing in the aircraft, and he was a chief aviation pilot. We had aviation pilots back then; they weren't officers. All the admiral's pilots was a chief aviation pilot. I imagine he was making \$120 a month plus flight pay at that time, but he was a crack pilot. They had aviation pilots first class and so forth. We normally carried sometimes two aircraft up on the catapult and a lot of times two down on the deck.

Marcello: How much emphasis was given to antiaircraft practice in those training exercises?

Crawford: Very, very much. I realized that because my battle station was as a hoist captain on an ammunition conveyer belt that transferred

ammunition up to the 5-inch batteries. I would say that that was part of it almost everytime we went out, to practice that. They stayed, as far as I'm concerned, well-honed in the part that they were playing; they did that all the time. They'd do at least some of that each time we were out on exercises, firing, for instance, at a distance or firing at a target being towed high in the air. Just about everything was used very much every time we went out. That was part of our exercises.

Marcello: When would the California normally come in off one of these exercises?

Crawford: Normally, it'd come in every Friday afternoon, sometimes later, sometimes earlier; but just normally, I would say, it was about five o'clock in the afternoon. Everyone would be anticipating liberty because back at that time you'd normally have four sections; and two sections would get liberty, and two sections would stay aboard ship to man the ship.

Marcello: What did you normally do when you went on liberty in Honolulu? What was your personal liberty routine?

Crawford: My personal liberty routine...I'd catch the liberty launch over to Merry's Point landing, and normally we'd take a bus, and sometimes, if we were in a hurry to get into town, a bunch of us would get together and take a taxi. We'd usually end up at the YMCA, and sometimes we'd get as far as the ol' Black Cat Bar, which was right across from the YMCA at that time. Sometimes we'd get no farther, according to how many drinks we'd like to

have. Sometimes we'd go in and have breakfast. But more often, especially after the war started, there seemed to be a routine that many of us would get together, and if someone had a car or other mode of transportation, we'd just all get in together, without eating breakfast or anything, and just to to a bar, normally down on Hotel Street, which at that time, and still is, one of the seedier parts of Honolulu. We'd just sit there and drink until one of us was sober enough to drive home...the soberest one would drive home. We'd be returning to the ship, and some of them were liable to get tattooed, and some came back with Mexican hats on, or anything. I don't recall that there was ever any violence or fighting or anything. It was kind of happy-go-lucky, like sailors do.

Marcello: Prior to the war, did you frequent Hotel and Canal Streets very much?

Crawford: No.

Marcello: I noticed that you don't have any tattoos, or I guess you didn't get that drunk.

Crawford: No, I never could get that way, but I had many friends who would do that and come back--some of them--with several tattoos, as many as they could get in one day; and then they'd go back, and they'd add more to it. It just seemed like it'd be on the same similarity as growing a beard or whatever at that time (chuckle). I never succumbed to that part of it. I never had any desire.

Marcello: What importance or role did the band play aboard a battleship at

that time? Let's talk about the California specifically.

Crawford: At that time, I know that many other battleships thought that they had the best band in the fleet, but I'm almost positive in my mind that there was more people on the California that felt that we had the best band that there was at that time in the Pacific Fleet. They were not the type just to play at official functions, like a smoker or a dance on the fantail for the officers or at some ceremony or whatever. They loved to play as a unit. You'd be out to sea on maneuvers, and they were liable to come up at any time in the afternoon when we had a free time and start playing, simply because they wanted to play. As far as I'm personally concerned--I think I can say this honestly for most of the other members of the crew--probably the biggest single factor, especially when you were out to sea, was that they would come up even though there wasn't a smoker, which we called a boxing event. They'd just come up and play, and you just heard the first note and they'd just...all of them. It was just similar to a crap game (chuckle). If one guy started to shoot craps, in a few minutes there'd be dozens there. Well, it was the same way with the band, you know, only it was a much, much larger group.

Marcello: What role did athletics and sports play in the life of the California in the pre-Pearl Harbor Navy?

Crawford: I thought it was excellent. I personally played on the USS California basketball team, and many times we'd look forward

to going over and practicing at the Admiral Bloch Recreation Center over there. I remember one time personally receiving a medal from Commander Carney for second place in the Pacific Fleet for sailboat racing. We had many boxing events aboard ship and movies. They played a very important part, I thought. If you were the least bit athletically inclined, you could find anything that you wanted to express your desires or your energies-- however you wanted to do it. I thought the program was excellent, myself. If you wanted to participate, you sure could,

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate, what changes, if any, could you detect in your training routine?

Crawford: Well, there's one that's very vivid in my memory, and that's during the last week we were out, prior to the attack. We were given recognition symbols, markings, of Japanese aircraft, which made it seem very realistic. I remember that on Thursday night before the attack that there was much to-do and much bustle aboard the ship. I recall the captain was on the bridge most of the night because we had submarine contacts. Our sonar or radar was going wild, and it seemed like we detected ships which we had never identified. They were not ours. They were not supposed to be in our area. They just seemed to be playing in and out of the fleet; just kind of trying to tantalize you, and we knew it didn't fit anything positive.

But I do know there was much to-do aboard ship, and I remember a friend of mine and I were sitting up under the 16-inch guns that night, and I remember asking him, "I wonder how deep it is in this thing--if we got sunk out here--how deep it is to the bottom of this thing?" I think we were realizing that things were getting down to a nitty-gritty.

Another thing that I realized was that in the last few weeks prior to Pearl Harbor, we had never had any maneuvers, to my knowledge, where you went to your battle station and remained on your battle station, with the exception of being relieved to go to the bathroom or something, for twenty-four-hour periods of time, without a pillow. If you got sleepy, you'd just lie down--if you were relieved for a while you'd just lie down and cross your head on your arm and go to sleep on a steel deck. They say you can't sleep without a pillow, but, I guarantee you, you can. But those are the only times I can ever recall where we manned our battle stations around the clock. Food was brought to us, and every other service was extended to us except going to the bathroom.

Marcello: What was the scuttlebutt going around as to the implications of all this? In other words, when you and your buddies sat around in your bull sessions, what did you talk about relative to this this kind of activity?

Crawford: Well, I believe, as I recall, most of them weren't especially talking about Japan as such; I mean, they did to some degree after being

given recognition symbols and insignias of Japanese aircraft. But I believe, generally speaking, that they anticipated that we were near war, but most of them felt that it could be with most anyone at that particular time. They didn't know where it would come or who from or what the scope of it would be or anything. The general consensus of opinion, as I remember it, wasn't especially directed toward the Japanese or any part of that country. They felt like it could be Germany or anyone, even though they were heavily involved at that time.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese during that pre-Pearl Harbor period, what kind of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind?

Crawford: Well, I think I had a pre-conceived idea, myself. I had always felt that the Japanese were very slyly intelligent, I guess, if you wanted a word to explain it, and the Oriental mind was capable of making an attack. I never thought it'd be on Pearl Harbor. That never entered my mind, and I don't know of anyone that I ever talked to that felt like the Japanese per se might attack us at Pearl Harbor. I don't remember that ever entering my mind.

Marcello: Okay, that brings us into that weekend of December 7, 1941, and let's talk about your routine during that weekend. First of all, let's start with Saturday, December 6. What did you do that Saturday?

Crawford: That Saturday, December 6, I remember it very vividly. I went to a football game at Honolulu Stadium. Everytime we were

in port and I could go to a football game, I went, even high school games, I remember some of the names of some of the stars that were high school players then.

Marcello: Do you remember who played that particular Saturday afternoon?

Crawford: Two of the high schools but I don't remember what their names were. I remember a couple of their players' names, who went on to Saint Mary's on the Coast, and both of them made All-American. One of them was named Spike Cordero, and another was Herman Wedemeyer. If you go back in history, I think you'll find that he also made it. Of course, that was a lax period of time, as far as athletics were concerned, but he went on to Saint Mary's on the Coast, near San Francisco, I believe, in that area. He made All-American. Then so did Spike Cordero, a Portuguese boy, I believe. Herman Wedemeyer was part-Hawaiian and, I believe, part-Filipino.

Marcello: What did you do that evening?

Crawford: That evening after the ballgame...I remember going into the stadium that day, and the Shore Patrol would shake you down going into the...give you a cursory examination, I guess. Normally, in some places, they'd go down the side of your legs and sometimes the inside of your legs. We'd notice that ninety-nine times out of a hundred, they'd just give you a shakedown on the side of your legs. So we had a half-pint of whiskey attached with rubber-bands to the inner part of our leg. So we got on quite a binge that night, as a sailor would do.

I believe, as far as I've understood, I was the only living survivor in my particular part of the ship. Many of them were overcome by fumes, and the ship listing and saltwater rushing in after the oil voids were penetrated below, which had the effect of...those steel decks...you'd look down at them, and as strong as they were, a rivet would pop, and all of a sudden, it was just like you'd taken a rivet hammer and just taken up the whole thing, and the fumes would come in from that. I understood later, from one of our men who'd remained on the ship, and that was in our division, that his job later on, six months later, when the ship was in dry dock, was to go down--and even then--with a flashlight and recover those bloated bodies of his shipmates that'd been in there for six months. I understand that the greater part of those who died...a lot of them were overcome by fumes, and having to remain on their battle station, simply slid down into the water. Many of them were just drowned in that manner. I assume they were kind of semi-conscious or whatever, and they tell me that many of them drowned down in this oil and water because by that time the ship was listing heavily.

Marcello: Let's go back to that Saturday evening again. I don't quite understand something that you mentioned. You mentioned that you'd been at a football game, and then you implied that you sneaked a pint of whiskey back aboard the California.

Crawford: No, I sneaked a pint of whiskey on the inside of each leg going into the ballgame. That's where they shook you down. The Shore

Patrol shook you down for taking any alcoholic beverages into the stadium. They were pretty rough on that. No, in my career in the Navy, I never snuck any...or attempted to sneak any...I wasn't that much of a drinker in the first place. If I was going to a ballgame or something like that, I would. I think it was just trying to, really, challenge the Shore Patrol and see if you could actually do it (chuckle). You'd get an early start because you (chuckle) usually knew you were going to a bar later, so you'd just get your own and try to get a head start during the game and be ready for that evening.

Marcello: So what time do you think you got back aboard the California that evening?

Crawford: As best I can remember, I believe, for the first time in my life, that I was some thirty minutes over-leave, but there was nothing done about it. They were pretty strict back then, but I guess they just overlooked it that night, I don't know.

Marcello: What time were you supposed to be back aboard ship? Was it midnight?

Crawford: I believe we were supposed to be back at midnight, and, as I recall, we got back about twelve-thirty. But there was some difficulty, and I assume that that's why they overlooked it--some difficulty because there'd been so many sailors ashore, the first night being in port. They had liberty launches shuttling back and forth, and they were just a little bit behind schedule, as I recall.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that Sunday morning of December 7, 1941. What I want you to do at this point, Mr. Crawford, is to describe, in as much detail as you can remember, what happened that Sunday morning from the time you got up until all hell broke loose, and what occurred thereafter.

Crawford: I remember getting up, and it was a routine morning. I later read in the book, some thirty years later, Tora! Tora! Tora!, that there was a storekeeper named Crawford reading the funny papers. Well, I thought, "Well, that's me," because I was down at my bunk reading the newspaper, and among those were the funny papers, which I always looked over. I later found it was a storekeeper named Felder Crawford, who was aboard the USS Maryland.

I had been reading the paper, and I decided to go on topside and went up there. We were one of the only ships in the fleet,... all of them were available for awnings on the forward part of the ship, main deck. This canvas had been rigged, and they were rigging it for church--what they called "rigging." They were setting up the seats and a little pulpit and passing out the hymnals and everything. I realized that, especially aboard a battleship, when they said the smoking lamp was out and to maintain quiet throughout the deck, they meant exactly that because they would have no compunction at all to put you in the brig if you didn't obey that.

In the meantime I'd gone back down to my bunk to continue

to read the rest of the paper, All of a sudden, there was some commotion going on, and they started blowing General Quarters. About that time, one of my friends came running down the stairs, and he said, "There's some great, big ol' planes up there with big ol' red dots on their wings bombing our ships!" I just kind of froze in my tracks for a moment, and then I went immediately to my battle station, which was about, I imagine, thirty feet away. I think that most of the men in our ship were so finely honed for an attack at that time that they probably could have gone blindfolded to their battle stations from any part of the ship.

At that time, I stayed on my battle station, and everyone else, of course, came down. In the "J" Division, we had blacks, whites, Filipinos, and...just a Duke's Mixture in the "S" Division because there was cooks and bakers and captain's stewards and what-have-you. I know that the gunner's mate aboard ship...we were trying to get some ammunition to pass up, and all of a sudden the gunner's mate appeared with the keys. I guess they couldn't find it at first, and they were all in a hurry for him to get that open, I assume that from our battle station where he unlocked this thing that we were almost right up on top of the ammunition storage rooms. He got that unlocked, and we started putting ammunition on the hoist and then passing it up. I guess...it seemed a matter of seconds later that the first torpedo hit us.

Marcello: Describe the situation when that torpedo hit.

Crawford: The first torpedo came in, and it was great surprise to me as to what the commotion could be when a torpedo struck a ship. When the torpedo hit the ship, it was just like you shaking a matchstick in your hand, and it shook that ship just like you'd be shaking a match. The lights kind of flickered like the lights will do before they go out. They did not go out, at least in my compartment, on the first torpedo. Of course, I guess we were trying to get everybody working as best we could under the circumstances, but we were expecting another torpedo any minute,

We didn't have to wait long until it came. When the second torpedo came, at least my section of the ship darkened. We were under watertight conditions, making it not any light at all down there. We were kind of operating under those conditions. All of our electrical system went out, and people started screaming. You could hear them even though we had watertight doors; you could hear some people start screaming and reacting in that manner.

From then on, I don't really remember a lot until I,,,all of a sudden, I was out on the deck, on the after part of the main deck, and I have no idea how long it had been. It seemed like hours, but I don't know whether it was eight-thirty or nine-thirty or ten-thirty--I don't know,

But a friend of mine, whom I still correspond with, came

down hunting for any survivors down there. He was only equipped with a flashlight. I remember this part--I may be rambling, but I'm telling you exactly as I remember it--I climbed up the ladder when I had every reason to believe that I was the only one still living in my compartment, because I detected no sounds, no nothing. I climbed up to the top of the ladder, and I realized that it was still watertight, secured.

At that time,...I don't know how I got back down the ladder, but I think I gingerly crawled backwards, and I guess I mustered enough strength to try to get up to the ladder again, and I realized that it was still just as watertight as it was when I went up the first time.

I remember to this day saying a little prayer to God. I was on my knees, and I said, "Lord,..." Generally, this is what I said...and prior to that, it was the same experience as people have related to me of drowning people or people that are drowning--that their whole life goes through. I remembered things that happened thousands of miles away--in the middle of a battle, scared, absolutely frightened to death--and I remember all this passing in front of me about how, when I used to sneak off to these swimming holes that my mother had told me not to go to and all these various little incidences that I was not too proud of during my lifetime and that I might have done as a naughty boy. All that seemed to flash through my mind in just a split second. Then I remember falling backwards then.

I don't know whether I just kind of gave up or not, but I remember saying a little prayer there. I said something to this effect: "Lord, I'm only twenty-one years old, and I'm kind of young, but if it's my time to go, I'm ready; but I kind of wish I could stick around a while longer, I kind of put myself in your hands."

With that, I fell backwards into the water and the oil, and I guess I must have rolled over toward the other side, with the ship listing that way. I had on this little white T-shirt or skivvy shirt, they called it, and little white short pants, so I was...at one time or another, I guess I got over to the other part of the ship long enough to at least be partially submerged in oil and everything else, because when this man came down and finally opened the hatch, he shined a flashlight in there. I don't guess I gave him any response at all because he didn't come down to get me then. He just shined a flashlight around, I don't even think I realized he was shining it.

Then he decided to make one more look, I don't know how much later that was or how...I lost all track of time, absolutely just frightened to death--and still am, I'm just as frightened today of the attack as I was the day it happened, I'm still running scared, really, to be real honest, He shined a flashlight down there again, and he said that I was...I wasn't aware of this until thirty-two years later, but I have the date at home. It was sometime in June of 1974, because the man was an Elk and

he was passing through Lubbock.,,he and I corresponded. He said he was having a drink out at ~~the~~ Elks Lodge, and he said, "Do you know 'Wally' Crawford?" Someone said, "Everyone in town knows 'Wally' Crawford." So he called me up. He was on his way to California, and he said he'd come out, and we'd just talk awhile. This was about as soon as we got home from church on Sunday. So we went out to Elk's Lodge and picked him up and talked to him for a couple of hours. He didn't leave until four o'clock the next afternoon. He spent the night with us, and we took him out to dinner.

All of a sudden he said...my wife and I and he were talking, and he said, "When did you get out of the hospital?" I said, "I didn't know I was in any hospital." Because there's a period of three weeks that I have between this--well, actually more than that--that I have absolutely no recall at all.

Sometime during the day of December 8 until January 17, at which time I was transferred over to the island of Maui, and when I stepped off the aircraft, it seemed like it was just a new and different world. I had complete recall of the attack and everything, and that night, and sometime up through the day of the eighth; but I have absolutely no recollection of what happened since--where I was at, what I did, where I went.

I remember going over to a hangar that next morning, and they had clothes that had been donated by all the ships in the fleet. I dressed, really, like you'd really call,..they used to say "a

married Marine mess cook overboard in a fire drill," (chuckle)
I had some Army clothes on and some Marine stuff and some Navy
stuff--anything you could grab that would fit you.

Donald Langs, a storekeeper second class in the "S" Division
aboard the California, said that the second time he came down
below, he saw a slight movement, and he came down to check on it
further, and I guess I'm eternally grateful for that. I still
correspond with him, and I understand that about a year or so
ago, he committed suicide. I don't know. He had some marital
trouble. I'm not positive of that, but they said they saw it
in the Gram. I didn't personally see it. Anyway, he simply came
down, and I was standing just as rigid as I could be with my...what
we called a stanchion, and I'm sure you're familiar with that.
The stanchion was, oh, about this big (gesture). He said that
my hands were clamped around them, and he had to undo each one
of the fingers individually. He didn't want to make a long story
short, but he said, "Well, at least you couldn't have been scared
for the last thirty-two years because you didn't have prior knowledge
of this." He says, "We were listing so bad then...." This was
just about amidships. He said, "The water and oil were just
beginning to lap up at your feet when I got you out of there."
I weighed about 165 pounds then, and he must not have weighed over
150 pounds, but somehow he got me out of there, and he took me
almost to the main deck, just inside the door leading out to the
main deck. He had to lay me down,

In his affidavit to the Navy Department, in order to try to get me a purple heart, he said the he laid me down on there, and that's almost the exact same spot where a bomb hit. He said he came back--he had to get some fresh air. There was foul air down below, and he just couldn't take it anymore, so he went out to get a breath of fresh air, and he'd come back to get me, and I was not there.

He mentioned to me and my wife when we were talking there, he said, "When did you get out of the hospital?" I said, "I have absolutely no knowledge of ever being in the hospital, except this...Doctor, I know this sounds funny, but the only thing I remember in all this period of some three to five weeks was the smell that you would generally associate with a sickbay or a hospital or whatever--just a smell of medicine and sketches of people in white. That's about it.

Marcello: So what kind of injuries did you have?

Crawford: I'm sure in my own mind that I wasn't injured until I was placed out with the other injured out on the deck. I have reason to believe that I was injured by flying shrapnel out there because one of them severed this temporal nerve here. It's been the cause of...well, I guess you'd take a migraine headache and multiply it by ten. Sometimes I've had it eight months at a time, and I just have to be completely isolated. I don't have no life; I don't want anything to eat; I don't want to talk to anyone or anything else. I haven't had a bad attack

in the last two or three years,

But I remember,..it must have been something around here that caught me right under my left instep. It must have been a piece of shrapnel there because I remember my shoe being full of blood, and even as late as the next morning, they treated it. They just laid us out on the quarterdeck out there. At the time, one of the things that I remember was that all the electrical systems were out, so most of the medics that were coming around on the deck were blowing these little whistles and saying,..(chuckle)I remember exactly the words he said: "Prepare to repel any landing attack." That's when I... don't know whether I heard all the things (chuckle) that I really wanted to hear, but I was absolutely frightened beyond words.

So I remember,..we must have had some electricity in at least one section of the ship because I remember distinctly that they could move one of the,..we had had twelve 16-inch guns, and they were able to swing one of those around. I didn't know whether that was to use at low levels or try to get that low or some show of strength or whatever, but I remember that.

I do not remember being evacuated off the ship. I understand from some friends that we were taken off by liberty launch and taken a few feet over to Ford Island. I recognized the place because I'd been there many times before. We was kind of piled up like,..more or less like cords of woods. And by that time, there was both Navy and civilian doctors and hospital corpsmen,

I guess, just a general "who's who" of whoever wanted to help at that time. I didn't know what they were treating me for or anything. I have no idea.

Marcello: So you don't remember the abandoning of the ship or anything of that nature,

Crawford: Absolutely nothing, absolutely nothing. It seems as though, in going back over this, that I had complete recall of some of this, and some was completely blocked out. For instance, that afternoon I don't remember a single thing except going over and getting these clothes. I have no idea where I spent the night. I do know that they told us that anyone who could walk should go back aboard ship that night and start to help cleaning up some of the debris. I remember very distinctly that they gave us strict instructions, especially to the anti-aircraft batteries, that there were, I believe, sixteen planes at that time off the carrier Enterprise, which was coming in. They gave them the recognition signals and what color their running lights would be and how they would be approaching and all the general information that you would give to them so that we would not fire on them. When they got into a landing pattern, all of a sudden someone started to fire, and it was just like all hell broke loose, and it just seemed like a real battle. I guess they were throwing up everything they had.

Marcello: Do you remember seeing that?

Crawford: I remember seeing that, yes. I don't even know what I was doing

even there; I mean, I don't remember going over there or where I was at. I think I was back on what we called the fantail-- I think, They were very low, but one of our pilots ejected by parachute, and, of course, the parachute failed to open. I remember that one of the pilots later told me that they counted some sixteen to eighteen machine gun bullets in his parachute and about that many in his body, too. His body became entangled in the rear portion of our ship and was kind of hanging over the backside, I remember that.

I don't remember where I spent the night that night. I recall that I came back to the ship the next morning, and our ammunition hoist had gone out. They'd formed a human chain, passing up ammunition right up to what we called a midship's ladder. I later understood that the way this had happened was that they made a lucky hit on...a bomb. I think this was only a hundred-pounder. It was one of those fragmentation-type bombs, and it made a direct hit down this line of personnel who were... those bodies were scattered all over everywhere. I remember that they had a rope, They'd give you a flashlight and a seabag, and they told you to slide down that rope and take that seabag with you, and a flashlight, and look around and try to get as much of one body as you could and put it in a seabag. Well, I looked down there,,and I think this is probably the most appalling thing that ever happened to me. I was talking to a member of the band off the California yesterday...I don't recall his name. It was

"Deke?"

Marcello: "Duke," "Duke" Bolen.

Crawford: "Duke" Bolen. He said, "Well, let me tell you about this boatswain's mate on the California, who I disliked very much." I said, "Let me tell you his name." His name was "Boots." We called him "Boots," and he was just as rough and rugged as they could be. I was shining a flashlight around in there and...it was just indescribable--the smell of flesh and the different parts of bodies laying around. I remember to this day, shining the flashlight up on top of the locker, and there he was...there his head was, up on top of that locker, and there he was...there his head was, up on top of that locker. I just stood there, and I remembered all that. I just died laughing. I just thought that was the funniest thing. I thought to myself, "Man, you got what you deserved! You've been lording over...." He was probably only doing his duty, but we always thought he'd been lording over us all these years: "You've got your comeuppance now, 'cause there's your head up there. I don't know where the rest of your body is."

But to make a long story short, I picked up what I thought was...the best I can remember...under the circumstances, I'd grab a part of every body and throw it in the seabag until I thought I had complete body, and then I'd climb up the rope on the other side. I don't remember where I went after then, but I know I didn't go back down in there again. You were supposed to

go down one side and get a body and then come up on the other side in seabags, I know that I didn't get but one.

Now where I went after that, I don't know, and I don't remember a single thing after that time, except that...this is a...I think that this occurred shortly after I came up from taking up my first and only seabag full of body. They started bringing up below on stretchers some men in my division that I was real closely acquainted with, and some of them were almost charred beyond recognition. Some of them, you could determine who they were and...I guess that you could call it...that's when I really broke; I mean, I just couldn't take it. I think that I had a mental...or just kind of...I don't know how you'd explain it. I just put it out of your mind, forever, and I don't remember a single thing--not a single thing, not even boarding the aircraft or getting the orders to go over to Maui, or where I was a single night or anything, except I just thought I was in the hospital.

Well, when this man was talking to me, he said, "You were in the Naval Hospital in Pearl Harbor along about the eleventh or twelfth." Because in his zeal to try to save me, he was very severely injured himself when he went out on the deck. He was injured by that same bomb that he thought had killed me. They took him up to one of those makeshift hospitals surrounding Pearl Harbor. They put those hospitals up there. He said, "I thought, until I saw you at Pearl in the hospital..." They later brought him down to Pearl, to the hospital, and he said, "I thought

you were dead." That's thirty-two years later, and it's very odd to hear something like that out of the clear blue sky, because I always had a feeling that I was injured and I was somewhere, but that was enough to say...if you have just absolutely no knowledge of it, there's just nothing to say. They couldn't go on hearsay or anything else.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Crawford, I think that's probably a pretty good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for having participated in our project. You've said a lot of very interesting and important things, and you've given us a slant on the Pearl Harbor attack that I hadn't heard before. I'm sure the scholars are going to find your comments very valuable when they use them to study this particular episode.

Crawford; I find it hard to explain. It's not a situation where you recall what you want to absolutely, and there are many incidents there when I have absolutely no recall, and there's many incidents that I can recall just simply as if they had happened this morning.