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Interview with  
EARL SELOVER  
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Place of Interview: Norfolk, Virginia  
Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello  
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Oral History Collection

Earl H. Selover

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello      Date of Interview: May 4, 1984

Place of Interview: Norfolk, Virginia

Dr. Marcello:      This is Ron Marcello interviewing Earl Selover for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 4, 1984, in Norfolk, Virginia. I'm interviewing Mr. Selover in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the battleship USS Maryland during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Selover, 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. Selover:      I was born in Wildwood, New Jersey, on March 8, 1917, and stayed there and finished high school, graduating in June of 1934. I had been enlisted in the Navy, and three days after graduation, I was on my way to the Naval Training Center, Norfolk, Virginia, for boot training.

Dr. Marcello:      Which meant you had been how old when you enlisted?

Mr. Selover:      Seventeen.

Dr. Marcello:      Now would you have come in under a minority cruise?

Selover: Yes.

Marcello: Explain for people who read the transcript or listen to the tape what a minority cruise signifies.

Selover: Well, if you were let's say, seventeen-and-a-half years old when you joined the Navy, by law the Navy was obligated to discharge you before you reached age twenty-one. Instead of completing a four-year hitch, therefore, you would only have done three-and-a-half years. In my case I was only two or three months over seventeen, so I did almost four years in my first cruise, as it turned out.

Marcello: Why did you decide to join the service in 1934?

Selover: Well, as far back as I can remember--and this is probably when I was eleven or twelve years old--I wanted to go into the Navy. For an instance, when I was in the eighth grade, a neighbor whose son had been in the Navy for twelve or thirteen years gave me a suit of dress blues that he had discarded. My mother cut them down to fit me, and I wore them to school for a whole month when I was in the eighth grade. I don't know...I just knew I was going in the Navy, and I prepared and planned my early life around that. Everybody in Wildwood, New Jersey, knew that I was going in--no doubt about it.

Marcello: What role or part did economics play in your decision to enter the service since this was 1934?

Selover: We were a very poor family. My father made his living off the ocean, which was practically nonexistent. If we hadn't

have liked fish, I probably wouldn't be here today. So one thing was the fact that I knew that I was going to be well taken care of in the Navy--for four years, anyway. I might have thought about college, but there was no way that I had the finances available to even get started. So, yes, I was looking forward to the security. Even though I was young, I was aware of the need for that, and always have been.

Marcello: How difficult or easy was it to get into the Navy in 1934?

Selover: They were quite selective, and you had to be a high school graduate, number one, and there were to be no problem with your police record and this kind of stuff. They were very selective. As a matter of fact, they had some of the recruiting stations shut down. Normally, I would have enlisted in Philadelphia, but I had to go to Baltimore to be processed after they had accepted me. It wasn't the easiest thing. You were lucky, I guess, in some ways to get in. Plus the fact that I was underweight. I thought maybe they would reject me. I only weighed about 112 pounds. They didn't feed me the usual bananas you hear people talking about, but they accepted me (chuckle).

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Selover: Norfolk, Virginia.

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

Selover: Three months. It was June, July, and August. And here in July and August, you sweat.

Marcello: Yes, I can relate that to my tour of duty in the Coast Guard. I spent part of it at Yorktown, Virginia. It was humid there, too.

Selover: Let me digress. We had our December 7th memorial service up at the Coast Guard Training Center at Yorktown--a beautiful, beautiful show. As a matter of fact, I'll bring some pictures in and let you see them before you leave.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened in boot camp at that time that you think we need to get as part of the record?

Selover: No, not really. It was tough. You washed your own clothes, and you behaved yourself. We slept in hammocks. It was a grueling situation. In my case I only weighed about 110 pounds, and sometimes lifting one of those seabags or the seabag and hammock, which weighed as much as me, presented a problem. Every evening, after drilling on the drill field, you washed your clothes and hung them up and hoped they would be there in the morning. I don't think there was anything unusually tough. That was just par for the course.

Marcello: Where did you go from boot camp?

Selover: Well, after boot camp I went on thirty-day "boot" leave. Our platoon was a good one. We earned several days extra leave because of our performance. Upon completion, I was told... I had been an amateur radio operator in high school, and I knew the code, and I could type. So when they interviewed me for a possible trade school, the guy, of course, thought

in terms of the radio school, but he says, "You already know what they'll teach you over there, so when you get back off of leave, we'll send you up to the radio station here on the base, and you can sit in with the experienced operators." Incidentally, on leave I took all my uniforms home, I guess, and at one time or another I wore every uniform that the Navy issued me--there in Wildwood. People knew that Earl had made it big in the Navy.

Anyway, upon my return, I did report to the radio station and sat alongside of operators who were manning circuits for about two weeks, and then I got transferred to the battleship Idaho, which was up being modernized, and had been completely modernized, and was about to go in commission over in Portsmouth Naval Yard.

Marcello: Describe the on-the-job training that you received during this period to become a radioman.

Selover: On the battleship, we're talking about?

Marcello: Yes.

Selover: Well, to begin with, I didn't think I wanted to be a radioman right away. I wanted to stay in the deck force and get some muscles, so I didn't say too much about having my radio background. They put me in the Fifth or Sixth Division, and we finally went down to "Gitmo" (Guantanamo) about a month after I had reported on board.

On the way down, they had some paintwork to be scrubbed

up in the mast area, and they gave me a bucket and a lifeline or something to latch myself to the mast, and I went up there and did my thing. I figured, "Now is the time to become a radioman." So I went down during lunch to see the chief radioman, a fellow by the name of Ward, and I told him my background. He gave me a little test right away, and by one o'clock I was in the radio gang.

Then there it was just on-the-job training. You sat alongside the experienced operators. You studied. The chief and others would conduct formal classes, you might say, from time to time with whatever they had available. I enjoyed radio. I loved it. I became quite expert at it in a short time.

Marcello: How rapid or slow was advancement in that particular rating in the pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Selover: It was rather slow for the most part. However, every once in a while, you'd find someone who was a little more capable, let's say, than others in the skill of copying code, for example. That guy sometimes would proceed up through the ratings structure much quicker than others, and this happened in my case. So by the end of my first cruise, I was a second class petty officer, and I made first class shortly thereafter, which was unusual.

Then to go a bit further, in my rate--the radio rate--after you made first class, you had to go to the radio material school at the Naval Research Lab in Bellevue, D.C., and take



a course in electronics for six months. It was a concentrated course, and you had to pass it before you could be recommended for further advancement to chief. So when I made first class, I studied diligently to get that school and eventually did. Upon graduation from the school a short while later, I took the chief's exam--Navy-wide chief's exam--and I made chief with a little over six years in, which was sort of a phenomenal thing in those days--one hash mark.

Marcello: What kind of a reaction was there on the part of some of the other people on the basis of your rather rapid advancement in rank?

Selover: I never sensed any. There must have been, I'm sure, from some of the older guys who had four or five hash marks and from the first class. Yes, I'm sure there was some resentment, but I was always able to get along with them with no problem.

Marcello: And you mentioned that this school was in Bellevue?

Selover: Bellevue. It was at the Naval Research Lab. It's right near Anacostia. The Naval Research Lab is still there--real big now.

Marcello: I guess, then, as a chief petty officer, considering what the pay was in the Navy at that time, you were doing pretty well. And this all took place within the course of...

Selover: Six-and-a-half years.

Marcello: ...six-and-a-half years.

Selover: Yes. My pay as an acting appointment, chief radioman, was

\$99 base pay, plus I had a little over...I had over four years, and that meant I got 10 percent longevity--\$108. That was it. Then just about a year before the war started, the comptroller general ruled that the top three pay grades in the Navy should start receiving \$37.50 a month as rental allowance, which the Army had been getting all along. So all of a sudden, I got a back lump sum payment of something like \$350 because of this ruling by the comptroller general, and I was able to bring my wife out from Philadelphia to Honolulu with that loot via the Lurline.

Marcello: This is kind of interesting because I gather the Navy wasn't too keen on having married enlisted personnel at that time unless they were over a certain rank.

Selover: Yes. As I recall, if you were to get married...if you were a second class or below, you had to get permission from the commanding officer to get married. Of course, if you were a first class or chief, there was no problem. A third class petty officer was making \$60 a month, so it's kind of difficult to support a wife. A second class made \$72, and a first class made \$84 and so forth.

Marcello: Well, at the same time, I gather, from what you said, the Navy wasn't providing any allowance for people in those lower ranks to be married.

Selover: Oh, they got none, no. A third class would get no...that would be all. His pay is all he would be getting. It was

the same for the chiefs up until this ruling by the comptroller general.

Marcello: And there was no base housing or anything like that provided.

Selover: There probably was, but not for the sea-going people.

Marcello: Describe the process, then, by which you eventually got aboard the Maryland and got over to the Hawaiian Islands.

Selover: I'm on the Idaho now.

Marcello: Right.

Selover: We put her in commission, and we joined the Pacific Fleet in May of 1935. In early 1938, I was what they called a day operator on the battle line circuit, which meant I was on this fast CW dot-dash circuit from eight o'clock to four o'clock everyday and got everynight liberty because of my proficiency. The flag officer who was...let me go back a bit. An admiral rode the Idaho--Commander, Battleship Division Three--and his staff rode the Idaho. He got transferred to be Commander, Battleships in early 1938. He took his chief along with him, and his "com" (communications) officer, and after they got over there, I got a note from the chief, "Would you like to come over to the Maryland, the flagship, to be the day operator on the battle line?" Boy, that was real big. Now I'm going to run the whole circuit. I told them, "Sure, I'd be glad to." So I got transferred over there and stayed with the flag...well, we stayed on the Maryland for a couple of months, and then we moved back to the West Virginia,

which was the permanent flagship. I stayed with that flag until after the war started with the exception of the period I went to that radio material school.

Marcello: So you were aboard the Maryland when the war started?

Sleover: Well, I've got to qualify that. The regular flagship was the West Virginia. And do you know it's very...and I got a little story to tell later on about the West Virginia and why she shouldn't have been there. Well, now's the time to tell it. The West Virginia was overdue for going into Bremerton. Now I'm talking about 1941. The Maryland was the only flagship that had the capability of taking the staff of Commander, Battleships on board because of the facilities he needed, and she was in overhaul in Bremerton and was late in getting out, unfortunately, for some reason. The flag couldn't leave the West Virginia, and the West Virginia had to stay there. Well, finally, the Maryland gets out of overhaul and arrives in Pearl Harbor...and I'm trying desperately to come up with this date. I know it can be had, but I'll say they arrived out there about November 12 or 15 from overhaul. Now I'm talking about the Maryland. She pulls in.

Marcello: This is 1941?

Sleover: Right, six weeks or so or less than that from the time of the attack. The admiral and some of his people went over to inspect it. I think I went--I'm not sure--because I was the chief radioman, and I was concerned with some of the radio

spaces. So, anyway, the outcome of the inspection was very unsatisfactory. The yard had left the Maryland in a mess. It wasn't clean, and it needed a lot of painting. So the admiral, Admiral Walter Anderson, brought the executive officer and the commanding officer back to the West Virginia to show them what he wanted the Maryland to look like, and when it was ready, we'd move on. So that's the way it was.

Now I guess it was about four, five, maybe six days or less--five, four, three days--before December 7 that the Maryland says, "We're ready for you," so we moved aboard. Getting back to the poor West Virginia, if the Maryland had been ready to receive the flag when she first arrived there, the West Virginia, which was long overdue, would have been back on her way home and never got caught out there. So that's how I got to the Maryland at the time of the attack.

Marcello: So actually, during most of this period, you were aboard the West Virginia and then had just recently shifted over to the Maryland.

Selover: That's correct.

Marcello: And how long were you to be on the Maryland?

Selover: Well, we would have been on the Maryland normally for about three months, until the West Virginia came out. I can't come up with the exact date, but I would say we were on the Maryland probably less than a week before the blitz.

Marcello: Describe more fully what your functions would have been when you went aboard the West Virginia.

Selover: You mean when I got transferred to the staff that was on the West Virginia?

Marcello: That's correct.

Selover: Okay, being a radioman, I was naturally a part of the radio gang. Like I say, they brought me over for this one circuit-- to man it. That's what enticed me to go along. All of the battleships...and there were twelve of them in the Pacific Fleet, but not all of them were in one group all the time. Some of them would be in the battleships which were in company with Commander, Battleships, which I was a part of. We would man this one circuit everyday, twenty-four hours a day. From eight in the morning until four o'clock in the afternoon, they had to have what was known as a class one operator on the frequency--a guy who could handle the speed key and who was good at handling the traffic. That guy then enjoyed certain privileges, one of which was liberty every night, which was kind of nice to come by because the ship's company got day on and day off. It wasn't like the modern Navy. So I functioned in that capacity for a year-and-a-half, I guess, and made first class and got to be the day supervisor, which again was one of those everynight liberties. But that meant that I was in charge of the whole radio shack during the day and had to check the headings of messages and formats and things like that and be sure we didn't miss anything and to be certain that the operators on the various circuits manned

them correctly, using correct procedures and this kind of stuff.

Marcello: When did you get married?

Selover: In April of 1940--April 6, 1940--in Philadelphia.

Marcello: At that time the Pacific Fleet had not yet moved to the Hawaiian Islands on a permanent basis, had it?

Selover: It was almost...I was going to this radio school I was telling you about out at Bellevue. As a matter of fact, in the middle of the class was when I got married. During this time at the school, which was between March and October, the fleet moved out there. I think it was in March--I don't know--but it was somewhere close to my marriage date. They moved out there, and it was obvious that they were going to remain out there.

Marcello: Were you aware of the fact that the fleet might possibly be moving out there when you did get married?

Selover: No. I had no idea.

Marcello: What kind of problems did this cause for you?

Selover: Well, of course, at that time I'm only making \$108 a month, number one, and so there was no way, even if I could find a place out in Honolulu, which was hard to come by, I could have brought her out there. If it hadn't been for that comptroller general's ruling, that \$37.50 rental allowance and a lump sum payment, I wouldn't have been able to bring her out. When they made that decision, I went looking for an apartment and just lucked out on one, It was just a

beautiful place out in the Waikiki Beach area--just unusually lucky.

Marcello: Describe your accommodations there.

Selover: It was property owned by an old gentleman named Hoople, and I'll never forget him. There were two large quadraplexes, I guess you'd call them, out front. There was an opening, driveway, going back, and there were a few little garages--sheds, I'll call them--and then to the right of that, there was one structure--laundry room on the ground level, and I guess you'd call it a studio apartment up above. It had one big room, a little kitchen, and a bathroom. No windows--you know how they used to do out there. It was just perfect for us. We had been married almost a year at that time. Then my wife got out in June, and it was just great.

Marcello: Do you recall what the rent was?

Selover: Yes--\$65 a month out of the \$145 I'm making now.

Marcello: That was actually pretty high rent, was it not?

Selover: That sure was, yes. My wife says that it was \$55. I was pretty certain it was \$65, but maybe I better go along with her figure.

Marcello: Well, even \$55 was pretty high, considering what your pay was.

Selover: Yes. Well, we didn't do any partying, and neither of us smoked or ever have smoked, and we didn't drink in those days, anyway. As a matter of fact, we put a few bucks away at the bank at Waikiki.



Marcello: When she did join you in the islands, I assume she then found employment?

Selover: No. She's never worked. We had friends who lived down the street--another chief off the West Virginia and his wife and another party across the way who now was a warrant officer but had been on the West Virginia with me and the other guy--so we had a little clique there, so to speak, that made it real nice. Now on the other hand, there weren't that many...now this one guy, the warrant officer, his ship was stationed out there, so he was in clover. That meant he could get the government to send her out. But the other fellow and myself, no. We had to pay everything out of our own pocket. There were not too many people who had their wives or families out there. There just weren't. I guess on the West Virginia, I'll bet there were no more than a dozen officers and enlisted men who had their families with them for one reason and another. Well, first of all, the fleet that had moved out there, the people weren't entitled to moving allowances. See, it wasn't a permanent change of station, so if you didn't have the "dough" to bring them out, they just didn't come out.

Marcello: All in all, how did you find duty aboard the West Virginia?

Selover: Beautiful. It was one of the finest ships I've ever served on.

Marcello: Why do you say that?

Selover: Well...and I'm not speaking just of the radio gang. We had a fine group on there, and you never had any problems. The

brig never had a customer, and that's where the radiomen... after the mid-watch they'd go up and sleep in the brig because you didn't have anyplace else to sleep except on the deck somewhere. Once in a while you'd get an executive officer or commanding officer who was a little...generally speaking, the crew would overcome, but...we just...it was just great. I think that was one of the finest ships I'll ever have served on.

Marcello: What do you think was responsible for making it such a good ship?

Selover: Well, I don't know. I have felt over the years that a ship that gets started right when it goes into commission--by that I mean having a reasonable type of commanding officer and executive officer and skillful petty officers; and they had plenty of those types in those days--sort of builds a foundation that from then on the ship will remain that way. Another thing --a lot of people may not know this--is that it wasn't unusual in those days to see petty officers, chiefs, or example...we had one chief on the West Virginia, Tom Sheily, who spent twenty-three years on the same ship. He never left it. And he wasn't by himself. There was others with fifteen, twelve years. So with that type of continuity, I guess is the word, the ships, I think...on the other hand, then the Maryland, when I went aboard her as a second class from the Idaho, had an executive officer on there--and I won't mention his name, but I know it--who was a madman. He made us drill holes in our

buckets. In those days, when you took a shower, you had to go get some water in a bucket and do your thing. So we had to drill a ring of holes around about two inches down from the top of the bucket so we couldn't take but so much in each bucketful. And he used to hold reveille on the chiefs--personally. He'd go up there and hold reveille--I wasn't a chief then--at five o'clock in the morning, which is unheard of. But that West Virginia was a hard one to beat--a hard one to beat.

Marcello: Some of those guys had been on there, like you say, as long as twenty, twenty-three years. They'd found a home.

Selover: That's right. I guess Tom Sheily would still be there today if it wasn't for Pearl Harbor. He was a chief storekeeper. Another one that spent many years on there was "Chippy" Woods. He just died recently. He was a boatswain's mate. I think guys like that somehow...and in those days a chief petty officer was a "wheel." There was no doubt about it. He was a real kingpin, and this was so even up to the early parts of the war.

Marcello: Well, like you were implying awhile ago, it normally took years and years for somebody to make chief petty officer.

Selover: Yes. Right, right.

Marcello: And I assume that in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy, transfers from one ship to another were not necessarily a common thing.

Selover: That's true. They weren't. No, not that as I recall. Of course, in my capacity as a radioman, I saw some of it from the

ship's company to the flag allowance maybe. The flag, of course, if he saw a radio operator that he knew he wanted, all he had to do was snap his fingers. But, no, there were no mass transfers from one ship to another. They'd maybe transfer to new construction or something like that.

**Marcello:** I would suspect that this continuity in personnel also might have had something to do for the high state of morale and the happiness of the ship. In other words, you don't have this constant coming and going of people all the time.

**Selover:** Yes, new ideas and new changes and stuff. But now to go back a bit...and I don't want to infer that on December 6, 1941, everyone was that happy all...the morale was to a certain extent at a low level because of the extended stay out there and being away from home and not seeing their loved ones. Not only that, but they had placed into operation a little known Navy regulation months before Pearl Harbor that allowed the Navy to keep a guy in beyond his four-year enlistment for I forget how many months. I'll say six. At the end of that time, they had to let them go, but he would have been released if the ship returned to the States before that time. There was guys who should have been discharged who were caught out there in Pearl Harbor because of this particular regulation.

**Marcello:** Let us assume now that the West Virginia is stationed at Pearl Harbor. Describe what a typical training exercise would be like for the West Virginia in that pre-Pearl Harbor

period. Let me be more specific. Normally, when would the West Virginia go out on one of these training exercises?

Selover: These occurred at a regular frequency. The ships for the most part, I would say, were out at least every other week.

Marcello: In other words, they might go out on a Monday?

Selover: Yes, and come back in on a Thursday or Friday. Sometimes half of them would go out, and the other half would remain and vice versa. Of course, while they're in the operating area, they would be doing their usual things--the anti-aircraft tactics, dive-bombing attacks, torpedo attacks by submarine, and this kind of stuff. It was typical. It was always going on.

Marcello: So the training and the exercises were a constant thing during this pre-Pearl Harbor period.

Selover: That's right. There was no lack of training--no lack of training.

Marcello: Now as one gets closer and closer to December 7 and as conditions between the two countries continued to get worse, could you in your position, for instance, detect any change in the West Virginia's routine?

Selover: No, I can't say that I did.

Marcello: Did the nature of the radio traffic and so on change in any way?

Selover: Well, let me say this. When did this start? Somewhere in, let's say, September or October, 1941--probably September--the staff had lost four or five ensigns. The admiral lost

five of these ensigns who were communication watch officers for him and who handled messages--routed it and this kind of stuff. He had to send them off to the San Diego area to put those fifty destroyers in commission. They needed junior officers. Now this occurred, like, a year before the attack. Right away we started using first class radiomen as CWOs (communication watch officers) on the staff.

But now somewhere, like, September of 1941, we received six ensigns out of N.R.O.T.C. units from various colleges to make CWOs out of them. I was pulled off other assignments. We have two chiefs on the staff. Walt, the older guy, took care of everything down around the radio one operation, and I took care of the six ensigns and the flag communication office. Underway, I'd be up on the bridge in the flag radio shack with some of these ensigns. My job primarily was to train these six ensigns and make them into competent communication watch officers, which I had just about completed almost, in a very timely fashion, when the attack occurred.

Marcello: I was asking if the nature of the radio traffic and so on changed as one got closer and closer to December 7.

Selover: No. No, we couldn't see anything like that. There wasn't that much traffic really handled, anyway. After the ships had been out there so long, everything was so routine. As a matter of fact, I'm pretty sure they had removed the requirement for having the real topnotch operator on this one circuit

I was telling you about during the day because there wasn't that much going on. Then, of course, you're sitting right there side by each, so you could pass your messages by wigwagging.

Marcello: Did you notice that the frequency of the general quarters drills increased as one gets closer and closer to December 7?

Selover: No.

Marcello: So it was more or less business as usual, then, right up to the time of the attack?

Selover: Right. And from my hindsight and from what I have read recently, there was no reason for anybody to be that concerned about it.

Marcello: When you and your buddies...

Selover: I want to make one more comment, though, about this readiness. One of the things we had to send out everytime we reentered port--now I'm talking just the battleships--was a message, a rather lengthy one, addressed to all the commanding officers of all the battleships in the harbor, which would describe a manner of deploying the event of an emergency. Now this was just, I guess, standard for many years. One of the things we'd do is come in the channel and go up abreast of where we tied up to those quays, and then the ships in a very laborious maneuver turned end-for-end, so the bow would be pointing toward the ocean. Then we would moor. This was just to give you another little leg up on getting out in a hurry, so there was thought of trying to evade an attack by at least being prepared to leave if we got notice.

Marcello: Now like you mentioned awhile ago, you were one of the lucky ones who was able to go ashore or essentially go home every evening when the Maryland was in. Incidentally, on a weekend would all of the battleships normally be in port?

Selover: Yes, normally. Yes, I believe I'm correct in saying that. Yes, as I recall. There were occasions when they would anchor from time to time over at Lahaina Roads. Now I can't recall if that included a weekend, but I believe it did once in awhile. But it was not as sort of a planned thing.

Marcello: When you went ashore, and specifically on a weekend, what did you and your wife normally do? Talk a little bit about your domestic life.

Selover: Well, as I said, we weren't the party-type people. We'd go to the beach, and there was a movie, the Waikiki Theatre. On paydays we'd go up and go...first, we'd go next door to the Wagon Wheel, a little restaurant, and have a charcoal-broiled New York-cut steak for, like, \$1.25--fine meal and a fine facility--and then we'd go to the movie and then on home. We'd listen to the radio and whatnot. And we did get together with our friends right next door. Down below in a cottage was a chief radioman by the name of St. Pierre. He was attached to the California, and he and his wife, Ethel, were friends of ours, and we would visit them from time to time along with our friends in the immediate neighborhood.



Once in awhile we would go up to the Naval Radio Station at Wailupe, which is up behind Diamond Head a bit. Like, on a Friday or Saturday night, they'd have a dance, and we'd go up there. I knew some of the guys.

One time we had a fellow who was my chief on the Idaho and who at this time was a warrant officer on Ford Island with an aviation squadron. He had a big convertible coupe Oldsmobile. He and his wife would pick us up, and we'd go around the island and do some sightseeing.

Basically that was it. Oh, we'd go for an evening stroll along Waikiki Boulevard, which was just about a "must" every night. It was just great.

Marcello: From what you say, I gather that you did not have a car there.

Selover: No.

Marcello: How far were you from the base itself in terms of going to and coming from the base?

Selover: I've been trying to find that out even during the last three years I was out there, and it's kind of hard. If I had to estimate, I'd say it's about a ten-mile journey from...in the vicinity of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel was where we were to Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: How did you get from your apartment to the base itself?

Selover: There was a trackless bus, I guess you'd call it--that thing with two things going down and getting electricity. This guy would go down from Waikiki into the neighborhood of the YMCA, and then you'd have to change to another type of vehicle,

either a bus or a cab.

Marcello: So it wasn't too difficult, then, to get from where you lived to the base?

Selover: No.

Marcello: I do know that for most of the enlisted personnel aboard the battleships, there was what they referred to as a "Cinderella liberty," which, of course, meant that they had to be back aboard ship at midnight. Why was that regulation in effect? Do you know?

Selover: I don't really know. I would assume that there weren't... first of all, the people didn't have the kind of money that you needed to stay in the Royal Hawaiian or something like that. I would say that there was a scarcity of facilities to accommodate these thousands of sailors that all of a sudden are on the economy. Perhaps another part is to sort of keep them out of trouble. If they're over there beyond that, there might be other problems to develop in the way of police reports, things of this nature.

Marcello: You might not be in a position to answer my next question since you were married, but I'll ask it anyhow. This is always a tough question to ask because I'm never sure exactly how to phrase it. Was there a lot of drinking that went on in Honolulu during the weekend when the fleet had come in? Or is it safe to say that the Navy was in many ways a mirror of civilian life at that time, where you had those who drank

to excess all the way over to those who didn't drink at all.

Selover: Well, that's a difficult one to answer.

Marcello: It was a difficult one to ask (laughter). I didn't know exactly how to phrase it.

Selover: And myself, being a non-drinker at that time, I wasn't... but, you know, just confining my comments to the radio gang on the West Virginia--and I relate to them more so than I do to the Maryland--out of maybe forty-five guys, there was probably half a dozen who would drink and have fun at it and maybe do a little excessive drinking. But on the kind of money the guy's making, a seaman at \$54 a month is not going to go over and drink too much too often. I would say to that question that I saw no evidence of increased drinking because of being out there in Honolulu--no way.

Marcello: We went into this briefly earlier in the interview, but at this stage, again, I want you to describe the procedure by which you moved from the West Virginia over to the Maryland.

Selover: Okay. The West Virginia was over-due for a shipyard overhaul in Bremerton--by a couple of months, really--at this time of the attack. The Maryland, the only ship capable of receiving the flag and accommodating it while the West Virginia was in Bremerton, was held in Bremerton beyond the expected date of its completion of overhaul and thus came out to the islands initially late, anyway, around the middle of November.

When the flag--the admiral and his people--went over

to inspect the Maryland to see if it was ready to receive them...we had packed our stuff. We were ready to move that day. He found things were in a shambles--the area we had to operate in--so he laid the law down to the CO of the Maryland: "Fix this up! Make it right! Come look at the West Virginia; we want it to look like this. When you're ready, let me know, and I'll bring my flag on board." That occurred in...I wish I had this date. You may have it someplace. I would say it was somewhere around four or five days before Pearl Harbor, like, maybe the preceeding Wednesday, we finally moved aboard the Maryland after they had cleaned the place up.

**Marcello:** Was your move to the Maryland going to be permanent, or was it a temporary move just so long as the West Virginia was now going into the yards?

**Selover:** For three months. That's right. That was normal. Whenever the flag...in the battleships you had Commander, Battleship Division One--Admiral Kidd, who got killed on the Arizona--and he had three battleships to take care of. Incidentally, he was the chief of staff on ComBatShips, and I served with him for about a year--a hell of a nice guy. Then you had Combat Division Two on the Tennessee and Combat Division Three on the Idaho. By now the Idaho, New Mexico, and Mississippi--BatDiv Three--had left. They were around on the East Coast. They weren't out there. Anyway, anytime one of

those flagships had to go back to the States, the admiral didn't go into the Navy Yard; he had to move to another ship. In our case the Maryland was the only one available that could handle us, and we had to wait for her to come out.

Marcello: As conditions continued to get worse between the two countries, did you and any of your friends in your bull sessions ever discuss the possibility of a Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor? Did the subject ever come up?

Selover: I don't recall that specifically coming up. I do recall discussing with some of my buddies who had been out in the Asiatic Fleet a couple or three years, "How good are these Japs? Can they hit anything when they fire their guns, for example?" And the usual answer was, "Hell, no! They can't hit...they could fire at it all day and never hit it!" That's the most that I can relate here of having discussed the Japanese and their prowess at making war. As far as an actual attack at Pearl Harbor, I personally have no recollection of ever discussing it.

Marcello: The general feeling was, then, that if the Japanese did have the audacity to engage in war with the United States, that war would be a short one with the United States coming out on the winning end.

Selover: I don't know if that was a general feeling, but from what these Asiatic sailors told me, it sounded like it wouldn't be a long war.

Marcello: You mentioned the Asiatic sailors. This really has nothing to do with the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, but these guys have always fascinated me. Describe what those Asiatic sailors were like.

Selover: (Chuckle) Some of them were pretty...well, first of all, a lot of youngsters wanted to go to the Asiatic Fleet. Now in those days--and I'm going back to 1935 or 1936--they provided two drafts of replacements a year for the Asiatic Fleet. They went out on either the Chaumont or the Henderson--old transports. I tried to get on one of those things in 1935 on the Idaho. It came out as a note in the plan-of-the-day: "Anybody wanting to go to the Asiatic Fleet, put your name on the list outside of the executive officer's office." I was about number five on the list. We went to quarters that morning, and the chief radioman, when he secured us, says, "Everybody's secure except 'Sealover.'" That's what they called me.

Marcello: "Sealover?"

Selover: Yes. My name is spelled almost like it, and especially when they got seasick, they really kidded me. Anyway, so they all left, and I'm standing there wondering what's going on. He says, "I understand you put your name on the list for the Asiatic Fleet." I said, "Yes, Chief." Boy, he really lit into me. He said, "You take your name off the list right now! Don't you ever go looking for any transfer without first

checking with your chief!" And I never did. That's as close as I got to getting there, but people did like to go out there. Some guys went out there and stayed years.

After the war I came back and put the Indiana in commission --a new battleship--and I had a guy who had spent eight years out there. He was a second class and came to the Indiana. I could tell you some stories about that dude. There were guys that loved it. I know a chief that spent something like twenty-two years out there.

Marcello: I understand most of those guys were not what you would call your ordinary sailor at that time.

Selover: Right, yes. But most of them--I'd say the bulk of them--went out there because they had to. They'd take a first class petty officer...I talked to one three times a week on the radio who was on the Idaho with me. He was a first class, senior-type, and they had to meet a certain quota of first class radiomen or whatever to send out, and he was ripe. He hadn't been there, and so he goes. He had to leave his family back here, and this is for a two-year tour, don't forget.

Marcello: I understand that most of those Asiatic sailors, especially those who had been out there for some time, had all sorts of tattoos. That seemed to be a characteristic of a great many of them.

Selover: Yes, that's right.

Marcello: You also mentioned awhile ago that the chief got pretty

upset when you had wanted to transfer. This has come up in previous interviews, and I assume that all this occurred because none of those ships were up to their complement, and they hated to lose a trained person.

Selover: Oh, yes, there's no doubt about it. The radio gang particularly were always shorthanded, and you couldn't get them to reenlist. It was rare to get people to reenlist. I say rare. I would say a majority, maybe 80 percent, would be gone after their first cruise. And that's right. They hated to lose a good man.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that weekend of December 7, 1941, and I want you to pick up the story at this point relative to your experiences aboard the Maryland. Now since you had just gone aboard the Maryland, I assume that you had not ever been out to sea on any exercises aboard her.

Selover: I think we had...yes. I believe we had been that week. And we came in Friday morning. I'm stretching my memory here.

I know this--I went ashore Friday afternoon for the weekend. I had a good flag communications officer, and he let me go whenever he could. When I left, the Oklahoma wasn't in. She was still exercising. Or maybe we came in Thursday. I don't know. At any rate, when I left, the Oklahoma hadn't arrived in port--wasn't tied up outboard of the Maryland. So I went ashore around two o'clock, and some officer leaving in his motorboat invited me to go.



To get to the meat of the story, the next morning--  
I guess it was slightly before eight o'clock--my neighbors  
next door, the St. Pierre's, hollered up, "Turn on the radio!  
Pearl Harbor's under attack!"

Marcello: What did you do that evening, that is, the evening of Saturday,  
December 6, 1941? Do you recall what you and your wife did?

Selover: Yes. We had gone to this dance at the radio station at Wailupe,  
and we arrived back home about...I know that the ship had just  
come in that day because actually...to tell you a little  
secret, I was upset. I didn't want to go to the darn dance.  
My wife made arrangements to go. Here we just came back in  
from sea, and I wanted to stay home. So we were a little  
tiffed at each other and went to bed angry. Then the next  
morning we had Pearl Harbor on our hands.

Marcello: What time did you turn in that night?

Selover: But I want to again make a statement. I'm not exactly sure  
of the movements of the Maryland, but I believe we'd been...  
we'd been to sea for a short period of time--like, Monday  
until Thursday. Now what were you saying?

Marcello: I was just looking at my records here, and it seems to me  
that the Oklahoma tied up beside the Maryland on Friday.

Selover: Right, Friday afternoon. I left before she came in, and  
that's what's throwing me off. I'm still not sure if the  
Maryland was in fact at sea that week. I should know that,  
but I don't.

Marcello: I was going to ask you...

Selover: I think we were at sea because of what I told you about Friday night.

Marcello: Normally, would there be a Saturday inspection aboard battleships? Was that normal procedure?

Selover: Yes. Maybe not every Saturday but a majority of Saturdays. Battleships were run like a training center for the most part. They were all regulation. You knew where you stood. There's no doubt about it. Everything was "by-the-book."

Marcello: Obviously, those battleships were pretty much open on a weekend.

Selover: Yes. Visitors were encouraged.

Marcello: Well, I was thinking primarily in terms of doors and hatches and all that sort of thing.

Selover: Well, at four or five o'clock every evening they would pass the word to set Condition X-Ray or Yoke or whatever it was, and certain hatches and doors between bulkheads would be shut off from one another, depending on what condition was set.

Marcello: Okay, what time do you think you turned in that Saturday evening?

Selover: Probably around...well, we went to the dance, so probably it'd be about eleven o'clock.

Marcello: What plans did you have for the next day?

Selover: None. But normally on Sunday, we always went to the beach, so that was probably what we were going to do.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that morning of Sunday, December 7, 1941. You mentioned that you received this information from the St. Pierre's.

Selover: That's right. He was the chief radioman on the California. They roused us out of our sleep, and I turned the radio on. Of course, as soon as I heard what was taking place, I knew that it was no joke.

We had made this arrangement when we first got married. I had always told the wife, "There may be a time when something will happen, and I've got to run. You've got to be prepared for that." I dressed in a hurry, and I was swift in those days. I only weighed about 110 pounds. I dressed--put my uniform on--and rushed down to Waikiki Boulevard--just near the Royal Hawaiian--and one of those buses was just coming along. Nobody was on it. Of course, Sunday was a dead day, anyway, at that time. So I got in, and he collected my money. Even though there was an attack on, he wasn't worried about not getting his money. He didn't pick up but two or three people between where he picked me up and the YMCA down on Hotel Street.

Marcello: In the meantime do you see any planes or anything like that flying over?

Selover: No, no. I get out of the bus in the vicinity of the "Y" and holler for a cab. Of course, there were several of them there. He said, "You want to go to Pearl Harbor?" I said,

"Yes!" Cab drivers were rather scary people to ride with in those days; I mean, they were like wild men. And they still are, really. But this guy gave me a quick ride back to the main gate of the Navy Yard.

Marcello: In the meantime, what do you see? What do you observe in that drive from the taxi stand to the main gate?

Selover: I can't say that I have a vivid recollection of seeing too much out of the way, really.

Marcello: Was it a hectic ride?

Selover: It was a hectic ride, and there was some traffic, but I couldn't attribute that to the fracas going on. This is still a little early. It's eight-fifteen maybe...eight-twenty.

Marcello: Was there anybody else in the cab with you?

Selover: I don't believe there was. I don't recall that.

Marcello: I assume he didn't give you a free ride out there even though it was an emergency.

Selover: Oh, no, no. He collected his fee. I probably gave him a tip. So he let me out...he couldn't go on the base, so he let me off at the main gate. From there I walked down to the Fleet Landing, which was a fairly new thing that had just been built a few months before and was not too far from the gate. I arrived at the Fleet Landing...and this is probably about nine-fifteen, I would imagine...somewhere in that time frame...maybe nine-thirty. From the time I'm leaving home until I get there, it's...

Marcello: So more than an hour has passed since the attack initially started.

Selover: I would think so. I didn't have a watch. So I'm waiting at the landing, and here comes an ensign driving a motorboat --an officer's boat. He says, "Where do you want to go, Chief?" I think there was a first class petty officer, too. He says, "Where do you want to go?" I says, "I got to get to the Maryland." And he says, "Where do you want to go?" I forget where the other guy wanted to go. We jumped aboard and headed out, and you're only half a mile from where I got on the boat to the Battleship Row.

Marcello: In the meantime, what's happening? What are you seeing during this period?

Selover: That's another thing. I don't have any recollection at this point of actually seeing planes flying. Now they're around. I know this. But they're, I think, up high because there is gunfire going on all over the harbor. Once in awhile the ensign would say, "Jump down in the cabin!" And we'd all get down in the cabin. Obviously, there was a plane coming somewhere.

Marcello: Did you have a chance to observe the condition of the water and so on in the harbor as you proceeded to your ship?

Selover: Yes. Well, that brought up my next big pitch here. In going out, and maybe a hundred yards after we got on the boat and got underway, I'm looking out and saw a whole bunch of clouds,

smoke, and this kind of stuff. I finally get to see this hull upturned. I thought, "My God, they sank the Maryland!" When we got a little closer and the wind parted the heavy smoke, I could see the superstructure of the Maryland, and then it dawned on me that the Oklahoma came in after I had left the ship Friday and tied up outboard of us.

So we get close to the Oklahoma, and there was a ring of fire from the fuel oil burning. This guy, it looked like to me, was going to drive his boat through there to try to get me on the Maryland. I said, "I don't think you ought to do that, sir." He says, "What do you suggest, Chief?" I says, "How about taking me up forward to the California," I knew she had a gangway over to Ford Island, so I figured I would get on the California, go to Ford Island, and then I'd work my way up to the Maryland somehow. So he says, "Yeah, that's good." So he took me, and I got off on the California, and I think this first class did, too.

I go up and get on topside, and, of course, she'd been torpedoed and is settling. She's not all the way down yet, but she's pretty far down. I see the chief radioman that was my sea pappy, a guy by the name of Shufert S.M. Reinhardt --about twenty-seven years in the Navy--and he's the one that got me from the Idaho to come over to the West Virginia on the flag.

Marcello: He's on the California now?

Selover: See, he had moved with Admiral Pye, who had been ComBatShips.

When Admiral Pye got advanced to ComBat Four, he took Reinhardt with him. I was asked to go, but I didn't like the flag communications officer, who was a pain in the butt. So I said, "No, I'll stay on the 'Weevy,'" which I liked, anyway.

So he's wandering around in a daze, and I collared him, and we talked for a few minutes. We talked long enough so that he told me that a mutual friend, another old chief radio-man by the name of Tommy Reeves, had been killed early in the attack and had been already recommended for a Congressional Medal of Honor--Tom Reeves, a real old-timer. He and Reinhardt had about the same amount of time. I chatted with him for a couple of minutes, and then I went over to Ford Island.

Marcello: By this time had the California already been abandoned for the most part? Had they abandoned ship?

Selover: I don't think they...I don't believe...if they had, there was still plenty of them left on board because there was all kinds of people.

So I get over on Ford Island, and I walk in the direction of the Maryland, and when I get up...I don't know exactly how far forward, that is, from the bow of the Maryland, I got on a...there was a pipeline that went around Ford Island. This was about, as I recall, maybe eighteen inches in diameter, maybe two feet. But I got on there, and it was a nice platform, and that went right down to the quays. It was right close to the quays.

So I was on that and was abreast of the forecastle area of the Maryland when they opened fire with their AA batteries. I'm out on this damn pipe. I think that's where I started losing my hair (chuckle).

But, anyway, from the pipeline I get onto the quay to which the foreward part of the Maryland is moored. From there they had some of the motor launches moored on booms that I could get in a motor launch and then by pulling ropes got myself over to the gangway of the Maryland on the starboard side and went aboard. So that's just about how I made my return.

Marcello: So what's happening aboard the Maryland?

Selover: Well, I immediately went up to my battle station, of course, and then I'm dogged down inside. Of course, the radiomen are doing nothing. With the battleships sunk, there isn't much we can do in the way of communicating. There's smoke all over the place. As a matter of fact, there was some consideration given to abandoning the Maryland that evening because of the heavy smoke situation. I didn't learn about this until I just recently read something by Admiral Anderson that indicated that. But there was a mess with smoke. Even though we were inside the radio shack it was rather difficult to breathe.

Marcello: What was the tenor or the conversation in there?

Selover: Well, there wasn't much conversation except, well, just sheer horror. There wasn't much we could say. We just were getting our tail kicked, and we didn't know if there was more coming



or not. There was some confusion. In those days they used to encode their call signs with a coding device that included five or six big sheets of cardboard with letters and all kinds of junk, and you had to take your plain language call sign and convert it into a code. There was confusion. Of course, there was a certain amount of berating, I guess, of ourselves for being caught in what obviously was in a flat-footed position.

Marcello: On several occasions you've mentioned the smoke. For instance, you mentioned that it was a problem in a sense when you were in that motor launch trying to get to the Maryland.

Selover: As far as viewing the scene, yes.

Marcello: And then you mentioned it again as creating some problems after you got aboard the Maryland. Describe what that smoke was like.

Selover: Well, it's heavy in nature, of course, black like you would see coming out of a coal-burning locomotive. And you've got to recall now that the Arizona is sitting down wind from us, I guess is the term I want to use, furiously belching out this black stuff from fuel and whatever also is burning. Then directly behind us, we've got the Tennessee pinned into the quay by the furiously burning West Virginia, which is on the bottom. Again, oil is burning, and you've got this black, billowing smoke. It was real rough.

Marcello: When you had a chance to think about what you had witnessed, that is, the Oklahoma turned over, the West Virginia heavily

damaged, the Arizona gone, the Utah turned over, what kind of thoughts went through your mind when you thought about it?

Selover: It's hard to describe. To go back a bit, as you know, I always wanted to be in the Navy, and I was proud as hell to be in the Navy. I was a chief petty officer, which was my goal in life, and I...I guess I considered myself Commander, Battleships instead of the admiral. I loved what I was doing, and I was probably a little cocky, too.

But that was just a horrible sight. I'd lost many friends on the West Virginia, and then Admiral Kidd on the...and plus some radiomen I knew over there. See, from having been on the flag we moved around to different ships, so I had contact with more people than the average guy would have. To see those ships burning and sinking and then looking at the Oklahoma with the bodies coming up every once in awhile--this was a day or so later--it was just terrible, terrible.

Marcello: I'm sure one of the things that was going through your mind was the fate of your friends on these other ships, since you didn't know what happened to them.

Selover: That's right.

Marcello: In your wildest dreams, do you think you would have ever imagined one of those huge battleships turned completely over, such as the Oklahoma?

Selover: No, no. Or to see something like happened to the Arizona happen to one. On the way out, these thoughts were...Jeez,

it was a real mess.

Marcello: What did you do that evening?

Selover: Well, I stayed up on my battle station all night, and most everybody else did. In the evening...we had a couple of circuits we had to man. You see, one of the primary sources of getting information to the Pacific Fleet in those days was the radio station at Honolulu called NPN. They used to send out messages serially numbered, and everybody had to copy them; and those that were addressed to you, you took action and so forth. Well, when this all occurred, of course, that became a focal point for important traffic, and CincPacFleet people could key this transmitter--they took over. Normally, it was keyed by shore duty personnel.

So that's one circuit we had to keep our eye on, and they had also a warning frequency that all the island monitored, and I want to say that was 900 kilocycles. The Army would be on it, and it was voice. The first one would be dots and dashes, I would describe them. I can remember that around nine o'clock that night on the voice circuit, 900 kilocycles, the warning net, if that was the frequency, there came a message that...we were getting a lot of fifth column activity, and an announcement came to the effect that Jap transports were seen unloading troops off of Waikiki Beach, and, of course, my wife is sitting right down a block or two from Waikiki Beach. That didn't sound so good. Then about fifteen minutes

later they canceled that.

Then around 2200--and I believe I'm correct on this time--over the radio CW circuit comes a message saying that enemy planes are approaching Pearl Harbor and that we were to open fire or whenever. Then about five minutes later, "Cancel my message number so-and-so. Planes approaching are friendly." And a few minutes later, "Cancel this one. Enemy planes are approaching. Open fire." Well, by the time they sent out the next cancellation, we'd shot down three or four PBVs. I may be confused. There was some fighter planes that came in, but I believe in this case it was the PBVs back off a long-range patrol, although I'm not certain.

Marcello: Do you recall the fireworks display? Do you remember seeing the actual firing and so on at the planes?

Selover: No, because I'm inside, see. The only people outside are the guys on the guns. The radiomen...I was in flag radio up in the superstructure of the ship, right below the bridge level.

Marcello: So you're completely enclosed?

Selover: Yes. I would comment on something that took place on the hull of the Oklahoma all that afternoon and up until dusk when we had to stop. We had people from the Maryland who were combing the ships' hull. Whenever they heard a sound on the Oklahoma's hull, they would cut an opening in the ship's hull, and they saved thirty-eight or thirty-nine people that way. Then at night they couldn't use a torch because we didn't know what

to expect from other planes, so they knocked that off until the next morning.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned the rumor of the Japanese landing over in the vicinity of Waikiki, and you mentioned your wife again. We've kind of forgot all about her. What thoughts were going through your mind relative to your wife and so on? Did you have time to think about her while you were in the midst of the stress situation?

Selover: Oh, yes, yes. I gave it a lot of thought. Well, it wasn't much...all I knew was...I knew she was with good company, and she wasn't in any harm's way and was with friends. So she was being comforted.

Marcello: Now St. Pierre did not accompany you back to the base?

Selover: No, no.

Marcello: Why was that?

Selover: I don't know. I was swift, like I told you, in those days, and I didn't even stop to ask him. I thought maybe he might have gone ahead of me. He might have. Hey, I don't know. I don't know if he did.

Marcello: Were there lots of fires and so on still burning that night?

Selover: Oh, yes. And the next morning.

Marcello: One person vividly remember the Arizona that evening as burning a "cherry red," to use his words. Do you remember the Arizona burning that evening?

Selover: Not specifically, no. I can remember the smoke and...no, I

don't recall that.

Marcello: How much sleep did you get that night?

Selover: I doubt if I got any. I don't believe I got any. I'm a light sleeper to begin with, and I remained in the flag radio area. I didn't sleep at all, and many others didn't.

Marcello: What did you do the next day?

Selover: The next day I went down for breakfast, I guess, about sixty or thereabouts in the chiefs' quarters. I returned to flag radio, and I want to tell you about the scene that I witnessed that I'll never forget. I stepped out of flag radio, I guess, about five or ten minutes to eight. I'm up in the superstructure, so I get a good view of the thing. I look forward over the bow of the Maryland to the California, which was sunk and still smoking, putting up smoke. Then I glanced down here at the hull of the Oklahoma with guys furiously working at the hull and looking for survivors and a motor launch slowly patrolling around the periphery of the ship's hull looking for bodies that were starting to pop up. I glanced aft, and there's old "Bandy" with our band assembling on the fantail ready for colors. Then immediately aft was the Tennessee penned in by the West Virginia, which was still sending up lots of smoke. Then finally, the Arizona--a real tragic sight. And there were people working on the lower decks loading the practice machines for loading 5-inch shells into the AA batteries. They were practicing getting ready

for whatever, I guess.

Then two things happened almost simultaneously. Over the loudspeaker came the signal or the word, "Attention to Colors," which, as you know, occurs every morning. Old "Bandy" and the band broke out with the "Star Spangled Banner." Just a beautiful sight. Horrible sight, I mean, but beautiful. As soon as we finished with the last note of the "Star Spangled Banner," he had the guys go right into "Anchors Aweigh." Everybody who could, that was topside, they stopped and cheered and raised all kind of commotion. The young ensign--one of the CWO's I mentioned to you--was standing along side of me, and he says, "Chief, those bastards are going to regret this day." It was a very touching moment in my life, and to this day whenever I render honors to our nation by saluting, I think of that scene. It was just...I wish I could paint.

Marcello: You mentioned this young ensign indicating that the Japanese were going to pay. What kind of emotions did you have in the aftermath of the attack?

Selover: Oh, nothing but very bitter...you couldn't find a word bad enough to describe...that was everyone.

Marcello: You mentioned this scene that you saw before you on that Monday, and this was perhaps the first time that you had a chance to look at it kind of objectively. What thoughts were going through your mind when you saw that?

Selover: Well, my immediate thought was, "Are we out of the woods yet?"

Are we going to get hit anymore?" Plus, "What can we do about the damage?" It looked to me like it was quite hopeless for most...well, I thought the Arizona would be finished, and I never thought they would get the Oklahoma...it just looked to me like we were really mortally wounded.

Marcello: When did you get a chance to contact your wife?

Selover: Oh, this is an interesting thing. Let's see. It was about ...I guess we got out of the...see, we were pinned in a little bit by the hull of the Oklahoma to the quay, so we couldn't move freely right away. We had to extricate ourselves from this situation. Until we got out, the Tennessee, which was directly behind us, couldn't move. So I'll say it was about five days later, or maybe less--I don't know--when we were able to leave our position and head over to the Navy Yard. Then the Tennessee came behind us. It was a week, I think, to the day--it was the 15th or the 16th--when they allowed liberty for people with families there, so I got to go home for the first time then. I was going home and coming back the next morning.

About the 22nd or maybe the 23rd, I returned to the ship one morning, and the flag communications officer, Commander Horn, called me and says, "Chief, don't send anybody off the ship for a while because we're going to change berths at two o'clock." He says, "Not even to get the guard mail," which is mail that's handled between ships by a mail process.



"Okay. Yes, sir." Well, about five or ten minutes until two, I find out, "Yes, we're going to change berths, but we're going to end up in Bremerton, Washington."

So the admiral had a chauffeur, a chief that took care of driving him around. I got hold of him--he was staying--and I wrote a little note to deliver to my wife. One of the other guys did the same thing. So that's how she got wind of it, and at two o'clock we get underway, and we head to Bremerton.

We go out the channel, and the Nevada is stuck on the ground there, and as we go by the ol' crew of the Nevada are up in the forecastle yelling, "Hip, hip, hooray!" I guess they thought we were going to fight the Japs, but we ended up in Bremerton. Had I known that morning that we were going to leave, I could have had my wife on the transport that we escorted back to the Coast. As it was, she didn't get out of there until April.

Marcello: In the meantime, had your wife been coping with the situation...

Selover: Oh, yes, very well.

Marcello: ...quite well? You mentioned that there was about five days that elapsed from the time of the attack until you see her again.

Selover: Yes. Well, it seems to me that I might have gotten a word... she's still got something that I wrote on a napkin and sent to her. I think I did. I think I did a day or two later.

Somehow, I got a message to her to the effect that I was okay and also that the husband of this one gal who's...his ship was out. The Pensacola was gone someplace, but I knew he was all right. So I did. She's still got that on a little napkin somewhere.

Marcello: I assume that you didn't have any telephone in your apartment, so any messages had to go by letter, note, or whatever.

Selover: Yes, right.

Marcello: The West Virginia was very severely damaged.

Selover: Very badly damaged.

Marcello: What were your thoughts concerning the West Virginia? You indicated awhile ago that you had a very very deep fondness for the West Virginia?

Selover: Oh, yes. I was horrified. It is hard to explain. The radio gang...and I knew some of those guys had been killed because of the position they were in. There's no way they could have avoided it. It was just horrible. They just got the new skipper, Captain Bennion, who was a prince of a fellow. He was turning the ship around. It had a few bad things that had gone on because of the executive officer it had had, Alexander Bennion got killed, as you know. Of course, we knew these things right away. When Admiral Kidd and Captain Bennion and the officers got killed, we knew this immediately. But I had no feel for who got killed in the enlisted order of things, but that came out a few days later.

Marcello: Now the Maryland itself had taken a couple of bomb hits, had it not?

Selover: That's right, yes.

Marcello: Describe those bomb hits. Now you may not have been on the ship at the time, but describe what they looked like.

Selover: You know, I don't know if I ever even went up to see them. I must have. But they were in the foreward part of the ship, and I can recall one chief saying that a piece of one of them, which would be something like shrapnel, I guess, went through his locker and went through it in such a way that it made a hole in all of his clothes that were stacked on top of one another. But I can't actually describe what the scene looked like wherever they hit. It was way up foreward, as I recall.

Marcello: I assume that the Maryland, when it left Pearl, went back to get refitted and refurbished and so on and so forth, that is, when it went back to Bremerton.

Selover: Yes, and the West Virginia and the California. They did a lot to them and made them more effective than they were. You know, I always said this for many years whenever this subject comes up in groups. The guys will say, "Supposing you'd had a couple hours notice and you got out of the harbor?" It's been the feeling that we'd have all been sunk. There's no way you could have resisted that air attack. You've got four or five little .30-caliber AA guns to fight off these planes

with all that speed, and the AA batteries had no shields around them. I didn't know this until John Korba told me a few months ago, but in the case of the West Virginia, it's my understanding, from what he said, that when the first torpedo hit that 16-inch armor belt that they had, which was bolted on, the damn thing fell off. And now you don't have any protection--just that one-inch plate. So I felt that if we were able to get underway, we'd have been really hurt. Admiral Nimitz expresses the same feeling. I was glad to read that.

Another thing that I...once in awhile I go out and give little speeches--talks--about this. As a matter of fact, I was up at the Coast Guard Station the other day talking to their graduating class--OCS. I say that if the admiral in charge of that task force had been a Halsey or a Mitscher or a Nimitz or a Spruance, he would have sent a third wave back in because we had the Pyro, the ammunition ship, loaded to the gills. We had the Ramapo with a whole bunch of high test fuel on it and some torpedo boats (they were heading south). We had all those oil storage dumps. My golly, a third wave with...that place would never have been useful for years. But I guess the admiral did what he came to do, and he did a good job of that.

Marcello: How long did you stay on the Maryland?

Selover: Let's see. We got back to the States right after Christmas,

I guess. I left there in early February with orders to commission a new battleship over here in Newport News--the USS Indiana, which I spent three years on.

Marcello: Well, I think that's probably a good place to end this interview, Mr. Selover. You said a lot of very interesting things and important things, and I'm sure that scholars and students are going to find your comments most valuable when they use them to study Pearl Harbor.

Selover: Well, I've enjoyed it.

Marcello: Well good.

Selover: It was very painless (chuckle).