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Interview with

GARLAND ROMAGOSA

November 15, 1987

Place of Interview: Kenner, Louisiana

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: *Garland Romagosa*  
(Signature)

Date: Nov. 15, 1987

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Oral History Collection

Garland Romagosa

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello                      Date: November 15, 1987

Place of Interview: Kenner, Louisiana

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Garland Romagosa for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on November 15, 1987, in Kenner, Louisiana. I'm interviewing Mr. Romagosa in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was aboard the battleship USS California during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Romagosa, to begin this interview just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born and where you were born--that sort of information.

Mr. Romagosa: I was born on May 24, 1922, in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Dr. Marcello: Tell me a little bit about your educational background.

Mr. Romagosa: I dropped out of school when I was a sophomore in high school in 1940.

Dr. Marcello: And when did you go into the service?

Romagosa: On September 29, 1940.

Marcello: Why did you decide to go into the service?

Romagosa: It was just a way to go someplace, to get away and travel.

Marcello: How much of a factor was economics in your decision? In other words, even as late as 1940, there were still hard times in many sections of the country.

Romagosa: Bad! Yes, it was bad. The economics was bad.

Marcello: Why did you select the Navy as opposed to one of the other branches of the service?

Romagosa: (Chuckle) I liked to go to sea, for one thing, and I was thinking it would be a clean place to go, since I wouldn't have to get in the mud and all that.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Romagosa: In San Diego.

Marcello: How long did boot camp last at that time? Do you recall?

Romagosa: Well, it lasted six weeks, I think. Six weeks, yes-- three and three.

Marcello: Evidently, that gives some indication of the rapid build-up because just a couple years before that the boot camp was, I think, as long as twelve weeks.

Romagosa: Yes.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened in boot camp other than the fact that it was the normal Navy boot camp?

Romagosa: Nothing that I can think of, no.

Marcello: Okay, where did you go from San Diego?

Romagosa: In San Diego, I was assigned to the California.

Marcello: You went right to the California?

Romagosa: No, I traveled on a tanker. They took us on a tanker-- the Neosho. It was at Pearl Harbor when Pearl Harbor happened, too. In fact, it was anchored behind the California. We went up to Long Beach and got on the California at Long Beach.

Marcello: Okay, you took the Neosho to Long Beach, and that's where you picked up the California.

Romagosa: Yes.

Marcello: Was your assignment to the California voluntary, or were you simply assigned to the California?

Romagosa: I was just assigned there.

Marcello: What was your impression of the California the first time you saw it? I'm guessing that it was probably the biggest warship you had ever seen.

Romagosa: Oh, yes!

Marcello: What was the impression of a young "boot" coming out of boot camp?

Romagosa: Proud, very proud--very proud.

Marcello: When you went aboard the California, to which division were you assigned?

Romagosa: The Third Division.

Marcello: And what was involved in being in the Third Division? What was its function?

Romagosa: It was the quarterdeck on the starboard side in the

number three turret. We manned the number three turret.

Marcello: Was it a part of the deck division?

Romagosa: The deck division, yes--seamen.

Marcello: And I guess it was pretty much a common practice to put just about every "boot" in the deck division for a certain amount of time.

Romagosa: No, I think they had an aptitude test at the time. To tell you the truth, I didn't know the difference between a screwdriver and a hammer when I went into the service.

Marcello: Let me ask you about some of your duties as a member of the deck division, and mainly I'm asking you these questions because, in part, they are a part of the Navy that is no longer in existence. Did you ever get involved in a process called "holystoning" the deck?

Romagosa: Yes, sir! Positively!

Marcello: What is involved in "holystoning" the deck? Describe how it worked.

Romagosa: Well, the deck was made out of teakwood, and what they do is just wet the deck down and throw a little sand on it. These stones were like a half of a regular brick--a house brick--with a small recess in it. You took a broomstick, and you put that into the hole--sticked the stick into the thing--and you just go like this (gesture) and just rub in a side-to-side motion, because there was planking. Then you'd get maybe five men lined up, and they'd just go so many strokes--five or six strokes--and then go to the next one.

Marcello: And what would that process do?

Romagosa: It would take all the marks out of the deck. In fact, we had a vice-admiral on the ship. He was the battle commander--battle commander--and that was his station on the ship. Sometimes they put lime on the deck, and that would make it really hard to clean after that (chuckle).

Marcello: Now normally, once that holystoning process was completed, what color would that deck be?

Romagosa: It was teakwood--wood.

Marcello: But what color would it be?

Romagosa: Almost white.

Marcello: And how often would you normally do that?

Romagosa: Once a week.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about your quarters aboard the California. Let me ask you this. Did you sleep in a hammock when you first went aboard?

Romagosa: When I first went aboard, yes. We slept in a hammock until we were assigned to our division.

Marcello: Describe the process of sleeping in a hammock because, again, that's another part of the Navy that's not around.

Romagosa: Pitiful.

Marcello: Can you continue? How did it work?

Romagosa: Well, they had hooks on the overhead, and then you hung it on each end. Then you'd pull it so taut--as taut as you could pull it--and you know what a hammock is (chuckle)!

Marcello: How far off the ground was it? How far off the deck?

Romagosa: Well, you had to bend down to walk underneath it. You were closer to the ceiling, I mean, right like this (gesture)

Marcello: In other words, you were about a foot-and-a-half to two feet from the ceiling.

Romagosa: At the most.

Marcello: And how did you get up in that hammock?

Romagosa: Oh, it was quite a job. Well, the ceiling is not that high. The overhead wasn't that high--about eight feet, maybe.

Marcello: But did you have something that you could pull onto?

Romagosa: Yes, we could grab onto the beams and swing up into it.

Marcello: And once you got into that hammock, what was it like to sleep in it?

Romagosa: Well, sort of you were cupped like this (gesture).

Marcello: In other words, you were kind of bowed.

Romagosa: Yes, bowed. It wasn't too good. You had to sleep on your back.

Marcello: How long did you sleep in hammocks before you got a cot or a bunk?

Romagosa: Oh, I imagine just about a week or so.

Marcello: What would happen to those hammocks once reveille had sounded?

Romagosa: Well, we'd take them down and roll them up. They had a process for rolling them.

Marcello: Now were your quarters. .were those same areas also used



for your chow? Did they have tables that they set up in there, also, for chow?

Romagosa: In some areas they could, yes.

Marcello: Was that the case in your area?

Romagosa: No, no, no, no.

Marcello: Did you ever take a tour of mess cooking?

Romagosa: No, I never did do any mess cooking--never--in the Navy.

Marcello: How was the food served aboard the California when you initially went aboard? Was it cafeteria-style or family-style?

Romagosa: Well, to tell you the truth, I have no recollection of that. It must have been cafeteria-style.

Marcello: You mentioned that in addition to being in the Third Division, and therefore being a part of the deck division, you were also in the number three turret. What was your function in it?

Romagosa: I was a trayman.

Marcello: Which involved what? What did you do as a trayman?

Romagosa: Well, it was a 14-inch gun, you know, and we're talking about big. The ammunition and the powder was kept below decks in the barbette. You've heard of barbettes?

Marcello: Yes.

Romagosa: Well, it would come up in a little cart. The projectile would come up first, and then it would dump the projectile onto a tray. Well, the tray collapsed. You had a gun captain and myself, you see, and he would be the front man at the breech of the gun. So he would

throw the tray, and I would be with him to help him out. We'd get it straightened like that (gesture). The projectile would come along, and we had a rammer--a man in the back who was called a rammer--and he rammed the shell into the breech.

Marcello: And then did the powder follow it?

Romagosa: No, then the little hopper--elevator--went down below and came back up with four sacks of powder. So I was a trayman, as you would call him, so I would take the two sacks at the top that would go out onto the tray, and I'd push one of them back, and the gun captain would push one of them into the breech of the gun. Then the other two would follow, and the rammer would ram the whole four sacks into the gun. He'd close the breech, and they had another fellow who would prime it.

Marcello: So in other words, your battle station, then, would have been in the turret itself.

Romagosa: In that turret, yes.

Marcello: Now did you remain in that number three turret right up until the attack itself?

Romagosa: Right, I was in it--in the turret.

Marcello: Okay, do you remember when the California moved to. .well, let me put it this way. When did you get to the California, that is, when did you go aboard the California? Do you remember when?

Romagosa: It must have been the beginning of November.

Marcello: Of 1940?

Romagosa: In 1940, yes.

Marcello: And then when did the California move to Pearl Harbor on a more or less permanent basis?

Romagosa: Well, we went up to Bremerton for about three months. We spent three months up in Bremerton, and then we came back down to Long Beach and did a little maneuvering off Santa Catalina Island and all like that. We did some shooting and all. Then we came back to Long Beach--we used to operate out of Long Beach--and then we went over to Hawaii.

Marcello: So you went over to Hawaii on a more or less permanent basis sometime maybe in the middle or late spring of 1941. Is that pretty close?

Romagosa: Yes.

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

Romagosa: Oh, pretty good. If I could reminisce about something for you, it might help.

Marcello: Sure.

Romagosa: When we left California, we were on our own. We went to travel to Hawaii on our own. I don't know the name of the man, but he used to be like an editor or a writer for the Saturday Evening Post, and he happened to be on our ship going over with us. So at the time, a Japanese merchant ship was loaded down, and it was on the same course we were on. I don't know. We just kept going straight ahead, straight ahead, and pretty soon he did

swing out of the way and let us come through. But they were awful loaded down with cameras. They just took pictures of us and pictures of us. He wrote it up in the Saturday Evening Post at that time. He was a famous man. I don't know whether his name was Davenport or what. He was famous in the Saturday Evening Post during that time--1939, 1940, 1941.

Marcello: Once you get to Honolulu you obviously fall into a certain routine. Let me ask you some other general questions about life in the Navy. What role did athletic activities and sports play in the life of that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy? In other words, I'm referring to such activities as maybe basketball, football, boxing, boat racing and things of that nature.

Romagosa: Well, the higher the admiral, the better the athletes (chuckle). I'm serious. They had favoritism in those days.

Marcello: In other words, the more influence the admiral had, the better the athletes got.

Romagosa: He could transfer a person out from another ship to his ship--the battleship. Like, the Pennsylvania had probably the best football team at that time.

Marcello: Because it was the flag of the Pacific Fleet.

Romagosa: It was the flagship of the Pacific Fleet. However, the California had the battle commander. We had the paymaster and everything on our ship.

Marcello: So what you are saying, in effect, is that at times

there would be actual recruiting of star athletes and so on?

Romagosa: Well, the ships would. Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes. Did anybody ever tell you this before?

Marcello: Yes. I just wanted to get your version of it.

Romagosa: Oh, yes, it was. We had the champion wrestler on our ship.

Marcello: How about boxing? Was boxing a pretty big sport at that time?

Romagosa: Yes, it was big, but we never did have any boxing going on.

Marcello: I also know that most of the battleships were very proud of their bands. What can you tell me about the band aboard the California?

Romagosa: Well, they slept in the same compartment and the same territory that we slept in. They slept around the number two barbette--the band did. We had a good band.

Marcello: What would be its function? For what kinds of functions would it play?

Romagosa: Ceremonial.

Marcello: I guess what I'm saying is, would it ever put on concerts or sessions for the personnel?

Romagosa: No, we didn't have any concerts, no, no.

Marcello: Okay.

Romagosa: I don't know, but there were thirty or forty men in the band. We also had buglers, too, though. We had one fellow who was a chief bugler on our ship.

Marcello: Is it not true that even if one was a member of the band, he had a battle station and certain functions to perform like anybody else?

Romagosa: He did, yes. Oh, yes; oh, yes. Oh, yes--everybody.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the liberty policies and routine for the personnel aboard the California after it was based there at Pearl Harbor. First of all, do you remember how liberty was organized? How were the liberty sections organized aboard the California there at Pearl Harbor?

Romagosa: They divided the ship by four.

Marcello: Four-section liberty?

Romagosa: Yes, four sections. But there would be three at a time. Three could go at a time.

Marcello: Three could go ashore at a time?

Romagosa: Yes, three sections at a time. Then you had to be back before twelve o'clock at night.

Marcello: So they had to.

Romagosa: There wasn't anyplace to stay, you know.

Marcello: This is what's referred to as the "Cinderella liberty, is it not?

Romagosa: Yes, yes.

Marcello: On a weekend, therefore, could you ever get Friday and Saturday off? Was that possible at times?

Romagosa: Yes, if you knew someone over there. If you had a legitimate address, yes.

Marcello: But I guess what I'm saying is, could you go ashore on

Saturday, come back Saturday night at twelve, and then go back on Sunday?

Romagosa: Yes, yes.

Marcello: When you went on liberty, what did you normally do?

Romagosa: I went out to the beach and hit the houses of ill-repute. I never drank that much at that time.

Marcello: You mentioned the houses of ill-repute. Which streets were they normally located on? Do you recall?

Romagosa: Right down in town, right in town.

Marcello: Hotel Street and Canal Street?

Romagosa: Well, most of the hotels were out by the beach. This was downtown where you'd go. They had a hotel there, though.

Marcello: But there was a Hotel Street. I think that was the name of the street.

Romagosa: I don't know the name. I forgot. They had a lot of women barbers over there--that was another thing--and guys would go get haircuts, you know, at those women barbers.

Marcello: Let's talk about a typical training exercise in which the California would participate in that period prior to December 7. Take me through one of these exercises. First of all, was there a particular day of the week when the California would normally go out? Could you expect it to go out, let's say, on a Monday whenever it went out on one of its exercises? Or would that vary?

Romagosa: It would vary. My recollection is that it varied.

Marcello: Now once it went out on one of those exercises, what kind of activities would take place? What would it do?

Romagosa: Oh, we'd just get in line and maneuver around and have general quarters drills and have dummy drills for shooting. We'd have dummy loadings and everything else.

Marcello: How much emphasis was given to antiaircraft practice in that pre-Pearl Harbor period? Not too much at all?

Romagosa: They didn't have any guns for that.

Marcello: What kind of antiaircraft armament did the California have before the war?

Romagosa: Machine guns and a few little 5-inch guns, 5-inch/.5ls, I guess they were. They didn't have many of those, either. I forget the exact number. Most of the stuff was broadside guns. Eddie Jones was on a broadside gun. He wasn't on the antiaircraft guns, I don't think. He was on what they called a broadside gun. You know, it sticks out on the deck like the old-time ships used to have.

Marcello: Now normally.

Romagosa: We would shoot our guns, too--the big guns.

Marcello: I'm assuming that those were shot rather infrequently because of the expense involved.

Romagosa: Right. And the guns are made...they have a liner in them, and they can only shoot so many rounds. After that, gradually the projectile will pull the liner out, so you'll have to stop because at the back end of it, you know, (laughter) you'd be "up the creek.



Marcello: Normally, how long would you stay out on one of these training exercises before you would come back in?

Romagosa: I don't recall.

Marcello: Would it be at least a week?

Romagosa: Probably a week, yes.

Marcello: And could you more or less expect to come back in on a Friday?

Romagosa: No, you couldn't tell. No, you couldn't tell. As a youngster I didn't pay any attention to it because I didn't have no interest in it. Days didn't mean too much, you know.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, and as conditions were obviously getting worse between the United States and Japan, could you--even in your position--detect any changes in the routine aboard the California when you went on one of these exercises? On the other hand, was it business as usual right up until the time of the attack?

Romagosa: I think it was business as usual. It might have got a little bit more intense, but not that much.

Marcello: Did you have any more general quarters drills than usual?

Romagosa: Well, we blacked out. We started blacking out. I don't know what month that was. I don't know when that was, but we blacked out maybe a year before.

Marcello: Did this sort of thing cause any amount of scuttlebutt aboard the ship?

Romagosa: No. It's impossible to believe, but people were naive in those days (chuckle).

Marcello: How closely were you keeping abreast of current events and world affairs through the newspapers and things like that?

Romagosa: Pretty good, pretty good.

Marcello: Did you and your buddies ever talk about the possibility of war with the Japanese?

Romagosa: No, not war, no, no. We knew we had a treaty with the Japanese, and we couldn't cross the International Date Line with guns over a certain size. In other words, a battleship couldn't cross the International Date Line.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that weekend of December 7, 1941, and, of course, we want to go into this in as much detail as you can remember. First of all, do you recall where the California was tied up during that weekend?

Romagosa: Yes.

Marcello: Describe it for me in terms of.

Romagosa: We were the lead ship. Let me interject something here. I don't know if any other person said this. There was a dock for aircraft carriers in front of the California, and then the California had her own berth. Then there was a slip for a tanker to bring the fuel to the island--you know, for the aircraft--and then the rest of the battleships were lined up behind us, see. Well, I knew there was something strange. I don't know if anybody told you this, but one night within the three

nights before December 7, an aircraft carrier went to sea at night. I don't know, but I think it was the Enterprise that went to sea two or three days before the attack.

Marcello: It was the Enterprise.

Romagosa: My recollection was that it was that same Saturday night.

Marcello: Well, I'm not sure it was that Saturday night of December 6, but I think it did go to sea earlier.

Romagosa: It went at night, which was a no-no. Nobody ever went to sea at night.

Marcello: Of course, what we know it did, among other things, was drop off some planes at Wake Island, I believe, and at some other place.

Romagosa: I don't think it had a chance to get that far.

Marcello: Do you recall what the ship.

Romagosa: Did anybody mention that to you?

Marcello: I don't think they've ever mentioned that before, no.

Romagosa: You had heard this before?

Marcello: No, I had not heard it before--that it went out at night. I had not heard that.

Romagosa: It was at nighttime. But you had heard it had went?

Marcello: Yes.

Romagosa: Within about two or three days--within that period of time. Thursday, Friday, or Saturday night--one night.

Marcello: That is correct, yes. The Enterprise had left. Do you recall what your routine was aboard the California--or

ashore for that matter--on that Saturday the 6, 1941?

Do you recall what you did?

Romagosa: I was on duty.

Marcello: Do you recall what you did that Saturday night or what you probably would have done?

Romagosa: We used to have movies. I probably was watching a movie on deck.

Marcello: Usually, on a Saturday night, were things pretty quiet aboard ship?

Romagosa: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Normally, there would be one-fourth of the crew aboard--from what you said--if you had the four sections of liberty?

Romagosa: Well, there would be four sections, so there would be three-quarters of them gone. One-fourth would be there.

Marcello: That's right. One-fourth would be on board. Okay, this takes us into that Sunday morning of December 7. Describe for me what your routine was from the time that you woke up until all hell broke loose.

Romagosa: Well, we just woke up, and we did our regular things. We went out on deck and did our regular stuff, you know, what we'd do normally--mop, swab the deck down, or something like that--and come back in. Then it was time to eat.

Marcello: Approximately what time would you have begun to eat?

Romagosa: About 7:30 or 7:45--something like that. We were sitting at tables. We were served. We were sitting at

a table.

Marcello: Okay, I asked awhile ago about family-style, and you were served family-style.

Romagosa: Yes, yes, yes. Family-style, yes.

Marcello: Okay, so you're sitting at the table eating chow. What happens next?

Romagosa: Then we heard some scuttlebutt. Somebody came and said something about planes or something, and so then they finally sounded General Quarters.

Marcello: How was General Quarters sounded?

Romagosa: Oh, it's a sound that will shiver you--a very high-pitched sound.

Marcello: Is it a gong or a klaxon of some sort?

Romagosa: Yes, it's a "BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!"

Marcello: Okay, so what do you do at that point?

Romagosa: Then I haul ass to the turret. That's my battle station.

Marcello: Okay, are you still the trayman in the number three turret?

Romagosa: Yes, right. I'm still a trayman.

Marcello: Now the number three turret would be aft, is that correct?

Romagosa: Aft, yes, the highest one.

Marcello: The California, according to the record, caught its first torpedo at 8:05. Were you already at the turret by that time?

Romagosa: Yes. Oh, yes!

Marcello: Recall what you remember from the effects of that

torpedo hitting the California?

Romagosa: Well, what happened was that it hit, and it didn't really bother me at all, really. The word was passed that the ship was kind of listing, and when it started to list, the ammunition hoist would not function.

Marcello: In other words, had the power been knocked out?

Romagosa: No, we still had our electricity and all. But what happened was that the ship was at such a tilt that the hoist that would hoist the ammunition would not function. They needed somebody to pass the ammunition, so I volunteered to go down below decks.

Marcello: Very shortly after that first torpedo hit at 8:05, then another one hit farther aft. Do you remember that one?

Romagosa: Yes, I remember very well.

Marcello: Describe the sensation and the feeling and what you remember about it.

Romagosa: Well, just everything went dark, and people were screaming. Have you ever seen a picture of the California?

Marcello: Yes.

Romagosa: Well, the main deck is at the back end of the ship, and then you have a deck that goes up. Well, that part that goes up would be the second deck, you know, above the waterline. But the main deck runs the whole length of the ship. So I was in this one spot there where they served chow. I was farther back up into the hold, and when it went off, it just blew people all over the

place. People were clawing and hanging on me and everything else.

Marcello: Well, you were not in the turret?

Romagosa: No, I had left the turret to go down below.

Marcello: Oh, you were on your way down below when this occurred?

Romagosa: Yes, to help pass the ammunition up.

Marcello: Was there an ear-shattering noise or anything of that nature, or was it a dull thud when it hit?

Romagosa: To tell you the truth, what happened, I think, really, is that...was the California hit by a bomb?

Marcello: Later on it was, yes.

Romagosa: Well, that's my recollection--that bomb. The bomb hit behind there, because I was burned. I had to go to the hospital. I spent time in the hospital.

Marcello: Okay, so let's get back to the torpedo again. You mentioned that you're on your way down.

Romagosa: Down the hatch, yes. I was on the main deck, though.

Marcello: You're on the main deck, and you are going down to, in essence, hand-carry ammunition. Is that right?

Romagosa: Yes, yes.

Marcello: How do you hand-carry this ammunition? We're talking about huge projectiles.

Romagosa: No, not those big projectiles. It wasn't those, no, no. You're talking about 5-inch shells. They weighed about fifty pounds, fifty-five pounds, whatever.

Marcello: And would they simply be passed hand-over-hand up to where they were needed?

Romagosa: Yes, yes. Oh, yes. I never saw any of it going on, though, because by that time all hell was breaking loose.

Marcello: Okay, so the second torpedo slams into the ship. Incidentally, everything is pretty much wide open, is it not, in terms of doors and hatches at the time of the attack?

Romagosa: Yes. Oh, yes. Well, some of them were watertight; some of them were watertight.

Marcello: The power plant gets knocked out, so the electricity goes briefly. Do you remember any fumes from the ruptured fuel tanks?

Romagosa: No.

Marcello: Okay At 8:25 a.m. the ships takes another hit, and I believe this may have been the bomb.

Romagosa: Yes, that was the bomb. That's when I was hurt by the bomb.

Marcello: Where were you when the bomb hit?

Romagosa: I was in this place what I'm talking about. They used it as a mess hall for certain people, and they had a fellow who sold newspapers in that area, you know, a flunky, some kind of flunky or something.

Marcello: Were you actually passing ammunition at that time?

Romagosa: No, we had given up by then.

Marcello: Why was that?

Romagosa: Because we had lost power, so we couldn't do anything, anyway.



Marcello: What do you remember about that bomb?

Romagosa: Just that everything went dark. People were just screaming and grabbing on me, and I just fought my way out. I don't know how in the hell I got out of there--got out of the place. I was burned on the leg. I was burned on the right and the left leg--just on my legs. I had shorts on, I guess.

Marcello: How bad were those burns?

Romagosa: I spent almost a month in the hospital--in a temporary hospital at Aiea. I don't know if you've ever been to Honolulu, but at Aiea there was a temporary hospital at the time. They had just built it--tin, you know, like a .no, not even a Quonset hut but corrugated metal. And they had dug trenches; there were some trenches.

Marcello: You mentioned that you had on shorts. That was one of the nasty lessons that was learned at Pearl Harbor, was it not?

Romagosa: Probably so.

Marcello: I don't think after that they allowed shorts any longer, certainly not when they went into battle, anyhow.

Romagosa: You were supposed to have long sleeves and everything.

Marcello: Okay, the bomb hits, it explodes, and it causes burns so far as you're concerned. Did you get back out on the open deck again?

Romagosa: Back on the quarterdeck, yes.

Marcello: Okay, what happens at that point then?

Romagosa: They ordered Abandon Ship.

Marcello: You are still able to move, however?

Romagosa: I could move, yes.

Marcello: Did you hear the abandon ship order, or did you simply see people abandoning the ship.

Romagosa: I could see people abandoning, yes.

Marcello: Okay, what's happening to the California at this point?

Romagosa: Oh, she's settling almost in the water.

Marcello: Okay, describe your getting in the water then.

Romagosa: I didn't get in the water; I got in the boat. There were some boats there that came up to the quays. They called them quays--the docks, you know--where they used to put the lines out.

Marcello: Okay, so you get into the boat. Then what happens?

Romagosa: They brought me to the island--Ford Island, I think it is.

Marcello: How far away is Ford Island?

Romagosa: PFTTT!

Marcello: Yes, just very, very close, right? Just a spit away. Okay, continue.

Romagosa: And then somebody looked at me, and then later on during the day, they put me in another boat and brought me back in the shipyard where the landing was--the boat landing. Then they took us in a bus or something and brought us up to the hospital way up in the mountain on Aiea.

Marcello: Okay, between the time that you got to Ford Island and the time that you were evacuated, what did you do during that period?

Romagosa: I can't recollect.

Marcello: Do you recall where they put you?

Romagosa: I think we were just out still in an open field, that's all.

Marcello: What activity did you observe, or were you too much in pain to observe anything?

Romagosa: I don't recall anything.

Marcello: At that point did they give you anything. .did they give you any treatment for your burns, that is, before they took you over to Aiea?

Romagosa: No, no.

Marcello: Were you on a blanket or stretcher?

Romagosa: Wait a minute! They may have given me something. Yes, I think they did. I think they did wrap me. .put something on there and wrap a bandage on me, maybe gauze or something.

Marcello: So you were not really able to observe anything else that was happening there at that time?

Romagosa: No.

Marcello: By the way, what kind of a day was it in terms of weather and climate? Do you recall?

Romagosa: A regular Hawaiian day--a nice day.

Marcello: A good day for an air attack?

Romagosa: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Good visibility for planes?

Romagosa: Yes, good visibility. Well, we always got clouds. You know, there were a lot of clouds up in the mountains.

They got clouds there. But it was a nice day.

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned that sometime in the afternoon, you are evacuated from Ford Island. I'm assuming that you go across the harbor?

Romagosa: Right, to where the big hammerhead crane was in the shipyard. We used to have a dock there.

Marcello: Okay, describe what you remember from the surface of the water and so on as you went across there. Do you recall what it looked like?

Romagosa: Still burning. It was still burning, yes.

Marcello: Was there oil on the water?

Romagosa: There was oil, yes. There was oil, yes. The whole place was full of oil.

Marcello: What happens then when you get over to the hammerhead crane and the boat landing?

Romagosa: Then they put us into some kind of vehicle and brought us to Aiea and then up in the mountains back up in that place.

Marcello: I'm assuming that you were able to walk.

Romagosa: I could walk, yes. I could walk. It was very hard, though.

Marcello: Were you experiencing very much pain at this time?

Romagosa: Yes! Oh, yes!

Marcello: Now did the truck or vehicle have any problems due to traffic jams or whatever in getting from the boat landing up to Aiea?

Romagosa: No, no.

Marcello: What kind of a scene is there at Aiea when you get there?

Romagosa: There was still burning. There was still fire.

Marcello: But I guess what I'm saying is, what kind of activity was taking place up in Aiea when you got there?

Romagosa: Very little. Just a few people. .the place was really a small thing, like a bunch of tin garages, you know. They extended maybe fifty feet long or something like that.

Marcello: What kind of immediate treatment did you get when you went up to Aiea?

Romagosa: I don't think they saw me until the next morning.

Marcello: Did they assign you a bed?

Romagosa: Yes, they had a little bunk. I had a bunk, yes. A single bunk, yes. Nobody above me and nobody below.

Marcello: At this point how would you describe your personal mental state of mind? Were you too worried about your burns to worry about what was going on below? How would you describe that?

Romagosa: Well, I was thinking about the Japanese coming in there. That's what I was thinking. That's what everybody was thinking about--an invasion. There was a lot of rumors circulating about invasion and everything.

Marcello: So those rumors had already reached Aiea by the time you got there?

Romagosa: Oh, yes, yes. Well, we had a fireworks display at night, you know, a lot of shooting.

Marcello: Let me ask you a couple of things about that night. How safe would it have been to go out and walk around the grounds?

Romagosa: Oh, no, no.

Marcello: Why?

Romagosa: Because they would shoot at anybody.

Marcello: Everybody was nervous and trigger-happy?

Romagosa: Oh, yes, everybody

Marcello: You mentioned the fireworks display Describe what you are talking about.

Romagosa: It was just antiaircraft guns just shooting in the sky, that's all. They were supposed to have shot down some of our own planes or something.

Marcello: Yes, this is when two planes from the Enterprise were coming in and trying to land at Ford Island.

Romagosa: Well, they sure put up some fire. Did they knock them down?

Marcello: Yes, they got them both.

Romagosa: No kidding? Well, that was good.

Marcello: (Chuckle) Well, it wasn't too good because they were ours!

Romagosa: Well, they were ours, but it was good in that we could hit something! I mean, that was a good plus (chuckle)

Marcello: Did you remember seeing that fireworks display?

Romagosa: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Describe it. Describe what the sky looked like.

Romagosa: They just kept shooting, that's all--just shooting,

shooting, shooting.

Marcello: Lots of tracers?

Romagosa: Lots of tracers, lots of everything. Lots of explosions! Plenty!

Marcello: How long did the firing go on?

Romagosa: Oh, heavens, five minutes maybe. Maybe longer than that! They shot all night, I think.

Marcello: How much sleep did you get that night?

Romagosa: Oh, I don't remember. Very little, probably.

Marcello: Now obviously that bomb exploded pretty close to you.

Romagosa: It was an armored deck. I was on the deck that is called an armored deck.

Marcello: Which would be your main deck, is that right?

Romagosa: That's right. It would be, like, eight or twelve inches thick or something like that.

Marcello: And that's where that bomb hit?

Romagosa: Yes, that's where the bomb hit. I don't think the bomb penetrated it.

Marcello: Was there an ear-shattering explosion when this bomb hit?

Romagosa: It didn't hit in the compartment I was in; it was in another compartment. I was burned by a flash coming from one of the passageways.

Marcello: This was after the bomb exploded?

Romagosa: Yes, after the bomb exploded. When the bomb exploded, it just flashed, and that's when I was burned--by the flash. It was a pretty good-sized bomb. I don't know

the size of it. Do you know the estimated size?

Marcello: All I know is that they were armor-piercing shells that they used, and they had welded fins on them. They were using them like bombs. I had heard that they were 16-inch projectiles. Now whether they were that big, I'm not sure. But they were probably at least 14-inch.

Romagosa: Yes, they were big. It was big. I don't know if it penetrated the deck.

Marcello: What kind of treatment did you get the next day for your injury?

Romagosa: They just looked at the wound. They had some nurses there. I don't know if they had a doctor. They had a nurse, though, and the regular Navy medic, you know, corpsman.

Marcello: When was it that you were able to let folks at home know what had happened to you?

Romagosa: I really don't know. The Navy let them know that I had been wounded or something like that.

Marcello: I'm assuming that as a result of what happened, you lost all the possessions you had aboard the California?

Romagosa: Right.

Marcello: Did you have any cherished possessions that you really felt bad about losing?

Romagosa: No.

Marcello: You mentioned this once or twice, but how long did you say they kept you in the hospital?

Romagosa: I stayed there almost a month.



Marcello: I'm assuming that most of this was simply recuperation. There was no grafting or anything of that nature had to be done.

Romagosa: There was no grafting. Oh, no. It burned me pretty good, though.

Marcello: What degree burns were they? Did they tell you? First, second, or third degree?

Romagosa: It was at least second. It was second, oh, yes. The scab was thick like dried orange. It looked like dried oranges.

Marcello: After you were released from the hospital, where did you go then? What happened at that point?

Romagosa: Well, I had been assigned to the Astoria--a cruiser--and it left before I got out of the hospital.

Marcello: That was almost a good thing because wasn't the Astoria one of those that was sunk in the Battle of Savo Island later on?

Romagosa: Yes. Well, I lost a lot of friends of mine on it. They blew off the front end of it.

Marcello: Okay, you missed the Astoria. Then what happened?

Romagosa: Then I was assigned to a sea-going tug, and I missed that one, too.

Marcello: How did you keep missing these ships?

Romagosa: I was still not discharged yet, see. So they finally got me. They assigned me to what they called a "high speed minesweep. What it was was a full-stack destroyer--the Bremerton (just like Bremerton,

Washington)

Marcello: And where did this minesweeper see duty?

Romagosa: We just hung around. .well, we went to Johnston Island. Did you ever hear of Johnston Island? It's a flat little piece of thing out there, about 700 and some-odd miles away from Hawaii. What we really did was escort supply ships going there. They had some Marines stationed out there.

Marcello: And for how long did you serve on the Bremerton?

Romagosa: I served on the Bremerton for about six months. Then I was assigned to the fleet antiaircraft school in Waianae, Hawaii.

Marcello: And how long did you remain there?

Romagosa: I had good duty there. I spent about thirty months there.

Marcello: So almost the rest of the war then?

Romagosa: No. Oh, no. I spent about thirty months, and then I came home on leave. Then I was assigned to a "jeep" aircraft carrier called Hoggatt Bay.

Marcello: And did you serve on it for the rest of the war then?

Romagosa: The rest of the war, yes.

Marcello: In the Pacific?

Romagosa: Yes, in the Pacific.

Marcello: What combat, if any, did the Hoggatt Bay see? I know a lot of the "jeep" carriers were involved in the battle of Leyte Gulf. Did you get over into that action?

Romagosa: Oh, yes, yes. We were at. .where were we at? Let's

see. What's the place south of. .did you ever hear of Palau? It's south in the Caroline Islands. We were down in there, and we went to a place. .well, we used to muster at the Ulithi, a big atoll out in the gulf. Did you ever hear of the Ulithi? It's a tremendous place. I don't know if it's on the map anymore. Then we went into the Philippines through the Mindanao Straits, and we went up to Luzon. We went to Leyte, and then we went to Luzon and up to Manila. Then we came back down, and then, I guess, we went to Guam and then Saipan.

Marcello: While you were in the Leyte Gulf, did your particular carrier come under any attacks by the kamikazes?

Romagosa: My particular carrier?

Marcello: Yes.

Romagosa: No, no. But we lost some of them with us. One of them with us went down in the Mindanao Depths. At that time it was 34,000 feet--the deepest part in the ocean--until they found that place off of Saipan or someplace.

Marcello: And when did you finally get out of the Navy then?

Romagosa: In 1946.

Marcello: So you were in from 1940.

Romagosa: I went to Okinawa, too.

Marcello: You were in from 1940 to 1946.

Romagosa: We went to Okinawa; we went to Hokkaido, the northern island. Our planes were after their coal. They used to ship coal by barges from Hokkaido to Honshu. Our ship rescued Major Devereux, who was a Marine commander at

Midway. I was in the sail locker, and I made seabags, and we dropped a lot of seabags and all. Then we finally got our planes in there to land, and brought him back to the ship. In fact, they just had their reunion over here--the Wake Island survivors. We went to Okinawa.

Marcello: Did you actually witness any of those kamikazes?

Romagosa: Oh, yes, yes! The kamikazes would come over these mountains. Just as soon as they would get on top of the mountain, they'd just dive right down, and they'd hit anything.

Marcello: What kind of feelings or impressions did you have of those?

Romagosa: I don't know. I figured they were just. .you know, they were just. .that's the kind of people they were. So one time we had an experience. We were there off of Okinawa. We spent about forty-five days off of Okinawa, and the British were down below us at some other island. They had a British task force down there. I don't know what the hell they were doing way over there, but they were down there. They weren't at Formosa. So they wanted to back them off because they needed some rest or something. They were getting a lot of hell, so they sent us down there. We went down there with a couple of these "jeep" carriers, you know, and a few little destroyer escorts. They dropped. .these fellows with guided bombs...did you hear about those?

Marcello: Yes.

Romagosa: He went through the flight deck of our sister ship at the bow (chuckle). It went right through it and right into the water, and it never even hit the ship. It never hit the main part of the ship, and it never exploded or nothing. The poor British were down there, and they used to catch hell everyday.

Marcello: So you ended your career in.

Romagosa: Boston, Massachusetts. We put it in mothballs.

Marcello: In 1946?

Romagosa: In 1946. We brought some troops back from one of the...I don't know what place we brought the troops from. Then we brought some Japanese Zeros back and went through the Panama Canal. We dropped them off someplace in California, went through the Panama Canal, and just went up to South Boston and put it in mothballs. I was a boatswain's mate at the time.

Marcello: And is that where you were discharged?

Romagosa: Yes, discharged.

Marcello: In 1946.

Romagosa: In 1946.

Marcello: Okay, well, Mr. Romagosa, I think that's probably a pretty good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for having taken time to speak with me. You've given me certainly a different slant on the activities aboard the California, especially considering what happened to you. Of course, we are always looking

for something different in these interviews. I'm sure that researchers and students will find your comments most valuable when they use them to study Pearl Harbor.

Romagosa: I hope they find out something about that aircraft carrier. That always did bug me (chuckle).