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Interview with  
JAMES L. MCCLAIN  
September 15, 1988

Place of Interview: Cape Girardeau, Missouri

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved:

James L. McClain  
(Signature)

Date:

15 Sept 1988

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Oral History Collection

James L. McClain

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello      Date: September 15, 1988

Place of Interview: Cape Girardeau, Missouri

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing James McClain for the University of North Texas Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on September 15, 1988, in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, I'm interviewing Mr. McClain in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was aboard the light cruiser USS Honolulu during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. McClain, 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--that kind of information.

Mr. McClain: I was born on February 28, 1921, in a little town known as Ancell, Missouri, which is seven miles due south of Cape Girardeau.

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

Mr. McClain: I graduated from high school. That was the furthest I went in school.

Marcello: And when was that?

McClain: I graduated in 1939.

Marcello: Describe for me why you decided to enter the service.

McClain: Well, at the time the Depression was still on. I graduated from school in May, the 30th of May, and I went to Saint Louis trying to find employment. There was none available, so I came back to Cape Girardeau. I did get some farm work part of that year, and then two of us went down to the recruiting station, took the test, and were put on a waiting list. We waited from...I think it was about the 3rd of June until September before we were ever called to go to Saint Louis to take the physical to see if we were ready to go on in. So we got called and went to Saint Louis and passed the physical, and we stayed there, I think, three days. They were getting people from Springfield and other places so they could get a whole load of us to go to Great Lakes for training.

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

McClain: I had an uncle that was in the Navy during World War I, and when I was a kid he always regretted that he didn't stay and make the Navy a career. I think he was the one that sold me on the Navy moreso.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned that one of the factors that motivated you to join the Navy was the fact that the

Depression was still going on. Economic reasons are probably the primary thing that motivated most people to get into the service at that time.

McClain: Well, I'd like to emphasize this. It wasn't the monetary thing there so much, because when I went in the salary was \$21 a month. And they took \$2.46 out of my pay for insurance, plus when I was at Great Lakes, they took \$2.46 out of my pay for insurance, plus when I was at Great Lakes, they took \$3 a month out for a canteen chit, which was for laundry, etc. It ended up you had about \$12 to spend.

Marcello: And you mentioned that you joined the Navy in 1939.

McClain: Yes, sir.

Marcello: ...and that you took your boot training at Great Lakes.

McClain: Naval Training Station.

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

McClain: The best I remember, it was nine weeks.

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

McClain: No, sir, it was a normal Navy place. It's still in existence. It's been there for years and years. I've been back...well, I went back through there about ten years ago, and the old brick buildings are the same as they always were.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you got aboard the light cruiser USS Honolulu. How'd that come about?

McClain: Well, the procedure at Great Lakes was that as ships were in commission or personnel were needed, the Bureau of Navy Personnel in Washington, D.C., will notify the training facility that "we need X number of men or ship so-and-so. The company that I was in, Company 28, graduated on a Friday, and we stayed there for approximately a week before we got assignments. The whole company as a group went out to the West Coast. Part of us went to San Diego, some of us went to Long Beach, some into Frisco. There was a few who went to different schools, but very few. I think three men out of the 120 in the company, I think, got schools. It was five of us out of the company that went aboard the Honolulu.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that there were only three of you who went to school. I'm assuming from what you said that it was fairly difficult to get in one of the Navy schools at that time.

McClain: It was known as trade schools. The schools were very hard to get into. It wasn't the score you made on the test; it was a method that the Navy had in which they decided that you'd be more fit than someone else. I just knew one of them fairly well that went to a school, and he didn't have any idea how he was selected, because we

knew the scores. My score was higher than his, so I don't know.

Marcello: When you went aboard the Honolulu, what was your immediate function?

McClain: When I went aboard, the procedure was that you'd go aboard, and you'd be assigned to the chief master-of-arms. He was the main boss. Then he would check with the personnel people and ask them what do they need in personnel. Well, I was assigned to a deck division, the Sixth Division. There were six deck divisions, and I was assigned to the Sixth Division.

Marcello: Describe what kind of work you'd be doing in the deck division.

McClain: Well, when I first went aboard, of course, as a recruit you're swabbing the decks and washing paintwork and polishing brass and stuff like that. I wasn't up there long. I decided that I didn't want to be a boatswain's mate. In the Sixth Division there was gunner's mates and boatswain's mates, and I thought, well, a gunner's mate would be better. I believed I'd like that better. Well, it wasn't that easy to get in. I think I scrubbed decks for about two years before I ever got to what they call "striking" for gunner's mate. After I got that job, well, then I started going up the ladder.

Marcello: So you were in the deck division, then, for the first two years you were on the Honolulu.

McClain: First two years, yes.

Marcello: Tell me a little bit about the ship itself. When had it been put in commission?

McClain: The ship was put in commission in June of 1938, before I went on it in December.

Marcello: Of 1939.

McClain: Nineteen thirty-nine, yes, sir. I think it was December 14, if I remember right, the day I went aboard.

Marcello: So it was a fairly new ship.

McClain: It was a fairly new ship. It went in commission in Brooklyn, New York. It went on a trial run, and after the trial run, they sent it to England to pick up twenty million dollars worth of gold to bring back to the States and put in Fort Knox for England, because they knew war was imminent. I wasn't aboard when that happened.

Marcello: What did the main armament of the Honolulu consist of at that time?

McClain: The main armament of the Honolulu at that time was fifteen 6-inch guns, and they had eight 5-inch .25-caliber guns. At that time we didn't have no .50-calibers, 20-millimeters, or what was known as the pom-poms (1.1's) until after the war started. Then they added gun shields and put them aboard.

Marcello: Describe what your living quarters were like aboard the Honolulu.



McClain: Well, when we first went aboard, they had what they called a peacetime crew. The bunks was no more than three high in any living compartment, that I was aware of, and most compartments held anywhere from seventy-five to one hundred men. We had ample locker spaces for our clothes, and we had ample space to put our dress uniforms and peacoat and stuff like that. Of course, later on, when the wartime complement came on, they would have to put on another tier of bunks, some of them two high or five high. Up in the mess deck they had the facilities to swing hammocks. A lot of the new people who came on after the war started had to sleep in hammocks the whole time, and that meant you had to put them up at night and take them down. Of course, they put the tables down to feed. So it was quite a change. Of course, I wasn't involved with the mess deck sleeping. I had my own bunk, but those poor guys really had a time.

Marcello: What was the food like aboard the Honolulu during that period before Pearl Harbor?

McClain: Before the war we had excellent food. We had a commissary steward that...well, he seemed to be one of the few that I ever ran into that it was pleasure for him to put a good meal on the table. All the cooks he had had at least fifteen years service, and they were cooks.

Marcello: Did you serve a tour of mess cooking duty?

McClain: I went aboard on December 14, and I volunteered for mess cook on January 1.

Marcello: Why did you volunteer for it?

McClain: The chief boatswain's mate or the boatswain's mate first class was the reason. He volunteered for me.

Marcello: And what does mess cooking consist of?

McClain: Well, at that time they fed what they called family-style. You had two tables, and each table seated ten men. At that time you still ate on plates, china plates, knife and fork, and the old G.I. coffee cup. You had a big platter for your meat, and you had a thing that had a handle on it.

Marcello: Tureen.

McClain: Tureen.

Marcello: Tureen, yes.

McClain: You carried the food from the galley. Of course, nobody made big money, but if you was a good mess cook you'd always pick up a few dimes at payday. I learned how to get a few extra dimes. If they'd have a good meat, a steak or something, I'd be the first one up there. I'd go down and put my meat off on to a side and take a towel and wipe the grease off my plate and run back up there. In other words, my mess was getting two steaks (chuckle) until I got caught.

Marcello: Is it usually not true that the procedure each of those

mess tables was that the ranking person there would be served first? There was a regular hierarchy, was there not?

McClain: Yes. We started at the head of the table. One of the men I spoke of, he sat at the number one table. I had table number one and number two. And you sat by rank. If you were the lowest man on the totem pole, you set on the end--the second table, the last man. If there was anything left, why, you got it. Of course, none of us went hungry, but that's the way it was.

Marcello: Let's talk about a typical training exercise in which the Honolulu would engage during that period before the attack. For instance, was there a particular day of the week when the Honolulu would go out?

McClain: We'd go out every Monday morning. On Monday morning liberty was up at 7:00, and at 7:30 the gangway was raised, and we was underway. We'd stay at sea until Friday unless there was a fleet exercise. During a fleet exercise, we might be out there a couple of weeks. Normally, we'd go out Monday, and we'd come back in Friday and drop anchor about 5:00. Liberty would start, and then we were there until Monday morning.

Marcello: I've asked you that for a specific reason. If somebody ashore were observing the activities of the fleet, they would have soon pretty well detected a pattern, at least so far as the Honolulu was concerned.

McClain: Yes, sir. Yes, sir. We were transferred to...our home port changed to Pearl Harbor, I think, when we was on maneuvers in 1940. We went on maneuvers, and Admiral Richardson was the admiral of the Pacific Fleet at the time. Well, he wasn't in favor of it. He wanted to be based in San Diego and Long Beach and San Pedro. Well, he was fired and Admiral Husband E. Kimmel was put in his place. In fact, Admiral Kimmel, when he was commander of Cruiser Division Eight, was on the Honolulu.

Marcello: What kind of activities would take place when you went on one of these typical exercises before the war?

McClain: Well, there was always some kind of procedure. It might be that one day you might have fire drills, and another day you might have emergency procedures, like, people in the engine room would simulate that something happened in the engine room, you know, a torpedo hit or something like that. We had four old SOC-3 aircraft on there, and they were capable of towing a target, and at certain times they'd launch one of the aircraft, put out a target, and the 5-inch guns would fire at it. Then in other periods, well, every year you had to qualify to be efficient, both in short-range and long-range battle practice. That consisted of a tug of a pretty good size towing a target behind him--1,000 or 1,500 feet. I forget what it was. That was a "must" that you had to

fire on that. If you didn't qualify, you kept practicing and training until you could hit it. I think that started in 1940, and the first year we qualified. Then the next year, if you qualified or if the turret of the gun that you were on qualified again, you got a hash mark.

Marcello: Where did they usually place that hash mark?

McClain: Well, on the gun, on the turret. On the 5-inch gun, we didn't have what they called a gun sponson at the time. And they put on the...I don't remember if it was on the trainer side or the pointer side of the gun. There's a metal plate there, and they could print or draw an "E" and then a hash mark underneath about that big (gesture).

Marcello: And this was the so-called "E" for efficiency, is that correct?

McClain: Yes, sir. That hash mark certified that you had qualified the next year.

Marcello: It was quite an honor for a ship to get that "E", was it not?

McClain: Plus \$5 extra a month (chuckle).

Marcello: And you could get it in various categories. For instance, there was one for gunnery, and there was also one for engineering and things of that nature.

McClain: Well, sir, I couldn't answer that because I don't remember.

Marcello: It seems to me the one in the engineering department had to do with how efficiently they used their fuel and all that sort of thing.

McClain: That's a possibility, sir. I don't know.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. As one gets closer and closer to December 7, and as conditions between the United States and Japan obviously were getting worse, could you, even as an enlisted man in the deck force, detect any changes at all in the routine of the Honolulu relative to these training exercise?

McClain: Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

Marcello: How would it change? How did it change?

McClain: Well, about, oh, I'd say, six months or eight months prior to war, we'd go to sea, and they'd bring up ammunition from the magazines and put it in ready boxes up on the main deck. I think each gun had approximately sixty rounds of 5-inch ammunition available on this ready box. It had dogs on there where you could dog down and be watertight in case you ran into rough weather. There's no lock on it. It took just a couple of minutes to open it up, so in the event of an air attack, why, it was right there where you could have it. But it got so that when we'd go to sea, like I said, about eight months prior to the war, that ammunition would be in there. And when you were in port normally, the firing pin for the gun would be removed. It would

be taken down to the gun locker and cleaned and oiled and put there, and then when you went back to sea, the gunner's mate-of-the-watch would be down there, and he'd issue you a firing pin. You'd go back and put it in. Then, like I said, when we'd come in port, the firing pin was out because the gun was useless without it.

Marcello: What was your particular battle station aboard the Honolulu during that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

McClain: Well, I was still striking for gunner's mate. I was what they called the first loader. The gun had a facility on the left side of it with three fuse boxes. The second loaders and on down would take a shell and put it in a fuse loader, and it had a crank, and you had to cut the fuse on it. When the gun fired, I'd reach over and get the shell and throw it in the tray. Then the gun captain would ram the shell home with a ram.

Marcello: Let me back up here a minute. Okay, so you have the second loader, and then you mentioned a first loader. You mentioned that when the gun fired, something happened. You were actually doing part of the loading before the gun actually fired, were you not?

McClain: You had to cut this fuse.

Marcello: Okay, that's what the second loader would have done.

McClain: Well, they had about six or seven loaders. The second loader would crank his in, and then the other guy would crank his in. Then number three would crank his in. If

there was more than three, why, they would start to load wherever there was a hole alone. It didn't make any. .there wasn't no particular place they had to go, since any hole it could fit in.

Marcello: So all these shells were coming up.

McClain: Yes, sir. You had a hoist. You had what they called an endless chain hoist that worked by electric, and it came right out of the magazine.

Marcello: And what exactly was your function then?

McClain: I was first loader.

Marcello: And your job was to do what?

McClain: To take the shell out of the fuse holder and put it in the tray of the gun.

Marcello: And on which particular gun were you doing this? Where specifically were you at?

McClain: Well, I was on gun number two. It was the first gun on the port side.

Marcello: Was this one of the 6-inch guns?

McClain: No, it was a 5-inch/.25.

Marcello: Okay, now how much emphasis was given to antiaircraft practice during those training exercises before December 7?

McClain: Well, it was very little. The main thing is that that SOC-3 plane had to strain awful hard even to pull that target. They tried to modify the target and try to make it smaller, and, well, it didn't work. It was limited



according to how much cable was being put out. I'd hate to know that I had been up there flying that plane when them guns was firing. The cable was just too close.

Marcello: I'm assuming that you really didn't have a whole lot of antiaircraft armament aboard the Honolulu before December 7

McClain: Five-inch, that's it!

Marcello: As you mentioned a moment ago, you didn't get your 40-millimeters or your 20-millimeters until after the war started.

McClain: It was about eight months after before they could spare us to put us in the shipyard to put them on. They had what they called the gun sponsons, and they had them made up and waiting. But the ship had to go in, and they had to cut away part of the superstructure and weld these things in and run power up to them and whatnot.

Marcello: What are these things called?

McClain: Well, gun sponsons, is what it's called.

Marcello: Gun sponsons?

McClain: It was nothing but a gun platform with a shield around it.

Marcello: I think sometimes they were called tubs, too, weren't they? Gun tubs or something like that.

McClain: Well, yes, I've heard them referred to as tubs, but we referred to them on the ship...I think a tub and a sponson are a little bit different.

Marcello: Okay, so the Honolulu comes in on a Friday, let's say, which was its normal routine. Describe for me how the liberty routine worked for you.

McClain: Well, you'd come in, and you had what they called port-and-starboard liberty. Half the crew would be on the port, and half would be on starboard liberty.

Marcello: Port watch and starboard watch, right?

McClain: Yes, sir.

Marcello: What would this mean in terms of liberty on a weekend? How much liberty could you get? Would you get one day or the other?

McClain: One day or the other. Occasionally, you could put in for and get what they called a two-day pass. But normally you had to have somebody to take your place while you was gone. In other words, if you had a friend that came to Hawaii or knew somebody there and wanted to spend a weekend with them, you had to get somebody to volunteer in your section to take your place while you was away.

Marcello: Also, is it not true that if you stayed ashore, didn't you have to have an address?

McClain: If you was under the rank of petty officer first class, you had to be back at 11:00. Petty officer and chiefs could stay until the next morning.

Marcello: And why was it that you had to come back? Was there a particular reason why they wanted you back aboard the

ship by 11:00?

McClain: Well, there was just too many people in downtown Honolulu. They had enough trouble the way it was, and this was one way to kind of keep the people under control, by having them come back at 11:00.

Marcello: Among other things, I guess a lot of sailors wouldn't have had money to stay in a hotel.

McClain: That's right. They put that procedure into effect right after the fleet went out there. I never was allowed an all-night liberty all the time I was out there.

Marcello: And I assume, at the same time, the Navy didn't want those guys sleeping in parks or beaches or wherever.

McClain: Down on Waikiki.

Marcello: You mentioned something awhile ago that I should have asked you earlier. You talked about the privileges that the first class petty officers and above had relative to liberty and so on. How slow or fast was promotion in that Navy before Pearl Harbor?

McClain: Well, I'll give you a typical example. John Mason, boatswain's mate on the Tucker that I spoke of, had twenty years in the service when I went aboard, and he just made first class petty officer. We had two coxswains...well, a coxswain is before you make boatswain's mate second. We had two guys that had fourteen years in the service as coxswains. We had a couple gunner's mates that was...well, one of them was

second class, and he had in sixteen to seventeen years. I forget exactly which. It was nothing for a man to reenlist as a seaman first class.

Marcello: Did you have any of the old Asiatic sailors aboard the Honolulu?

McClain: We had an Asiatic sailor who was a boatswain's mate second class. He had twenty-six years in the service, and he spent twenty-three years in Asia. He was tattooed from his ears down, and he would sit up on the main deck when he was off duty on a bit, where the line went that tied the ship up, and he'd stare out in space for hours, just sitting there by himself. If you would ask him a question, he would answer you, but he'd never try to carry a conversation.

Marcello: They were a breed apart, weren't they?

McClain: Yes, sir. But he was an ideal...he was one of the best boat handlers that I ever seen. The captain's gig had a younger boatswain's mate, and the captain wasn't satisfied with him; and he asked the boatswain of the ship, a chief warrant officer, if he thought Johnson could operate that boat. He said, "Well, I don't know, but I imagine he could. So they got Johnson in it, and Johnson made one trip, and he told him, "You're the captain of my gig from here out.

Marcello: Again, I asked you about those Asiatic sailors because that's obviously a part of the Navy that's no longer in

existence.

McClain: Yes, sir. They had another one up forward, but I never did know him. But the same thing existed. You could tell.

Marcello: I gather that in many cases they were individuals that really didn't have any family or anything like that, and the Navy was their family or their whole life.

McClain: That was their whole life. If Johnson was ever married, I don't...of course, like I said, he never discussed anything like that. I never did ask him, but I don't believe he was ever married. He'd never go on leave, and very, very seldom would he ever go ashore, regardless of where we was at.

Marcello: When you went ashore on liberty in Honolulu, what was your usual routine? What would you do?

McClain: Well, of course, when we first got over there, I wanted to see Waikiki Beach. They had a recreation camp out from downtown out at Nanakuli Beach, and I'd go out there quite often. You could go out there on a weekend, well, in fact, three days; and the way it was supported was whatever rations it cost the Navy to feed you aboard the Honolulu, the supply officer would try to carry that ration out to this camp. They bummed a bunch of tents, cots, blankets, etc., and they had a real nice facility out there. They had, I believe, a lieutenant commander as the officer in charge. It was no military...well,

you had to make up your bunk, and you had to police up your area. They had movies, and they'd have some local Hawaiian talent come in and sing and whatnot. There was a beautiful beach. They had beer and soda.

But in downtown Honolulu there wasn't much for sailors to do with our salary. Of course, after the war started, they got a few girls out there, and we fraternized them some (chuckle).

Marcello: Of what significance are Hotel and Canal Streets? Does that mean anything to you?

McClain: On Hotel and Canal Street, yes, about every other building was a house of evil (chuckle).

Marcello: House of prostitution, is what you're thinking. And I gather that they were patronized pretty regularly by the fleet.

McClain: Yes, I've seen lines with sometimes fifty men in a line.

Marcello: Even before the war?

McClain: Well, it wasn't that bad before the war. Of course, there that wasn't many of them. Then when the war started, right after the war started, I never did hear if the military demanded it or what, but they shipped a lot of them back to the States. But I think the next boat or ship that came back, they was on it coming back.

Marcello: How much of a problem was drinking among sailors in that pre-Pearl Harbor Navy, particularly on a weekend?

McClain: Well, a sailor is going to drink. I don't care where he

is or anything else. Of course, the Navy put up some pretty nice clubs there on the base to entice the people to stay there. They had some recreation center there, and I've seen Horace Hite and his orchestra, one of the best at that time, and several big-time bands. They would have. .they'd call it the "Battle of Music. The battleships would compete against each other; the carriers would compete against each other; and the smaller ships like the cruisers that had bands on them would compete. Then they had the "Battle of Music, which was to see who was the best. They voted for who was the best. They had smokers, they called them, boxing matches and wrestling matches. In fact, everything was right there on the base. It got so that transportation was hard to get back and forth from town. A number of people--it was unbelievable--would catch these cabs, and sometimes you'd have to wait two hours to even get a cab. I spent most of my time right there on the recreation area, they called it.

Marcello: You mentioned the boxing smokers awhile ago. Did you ever attend any of those?

McClain: Oh, yes!

Marcello: What were they like?

McClain: Well, your boxing team would be formed on the ship. Then you would have a match. Like, if I was on the Honolulu, you'd box someone from maybe the Helena or the

Saint Louis in Cruiser Division Eight. They would box, and then the champion of them would challenge another cruiser division. Then after you worked up, why, you'd end up champion in your cruiser division. Well, then you would rise to the higher echelons with the battleships or the carriers, and that was a yearly affair.

Marcello: How important were sports and athletic competition in that Navy before the war?

McClain: It was great. In fact, I played basketball on the ship's team, and every afternoon we were allowed to go over to the gym and practice. Most of the games were played at night. Of course, at that time, before the war started, we weren't at sea...well, I'd say when we first got out to Honolulu, we wasn't at sea the whole week. But, like I said before, when we started to go out Monday and come in Friday, why, our basketball was done because we didn't have no place to practice or to play.

Marcello: I gather that sports were not so important in the Navy before the war as they were up at Schofield Barracks. That was a big-time operation, I think, up at Schofield Barracks.

McClain: Yes, sir, it was. But back in Long Beach, I think the Navy had as much sports as the Army did.

Marcello: Well, obviously, if you're aboard ship you wouldn't have



the opportunity to practice and all that sort of thing like the Army would have up at Schofield Barracks.

Okay, this brings us into that weekend of December 7, 1941, Mr. McClain, and, of course, we want to go into that weekend in as much detail as you can remember. As usual, did the Honolulu come in on a Friday?

McClain: We left on a Monday, and we came in Friday.

Marcello: Where did you tie up?

McClain: Well, we were scheduled to go in...we were supposed to have went into dry dock, but the Pennsylvania was in dry dock with two destroyers. Well, they got blowed apart when the Japs hit. Well, we couldn't get in, but they had us alongside the dock. We was just down from the dry dock, oh, 1,500 feet or so.

Marcello: So the two destroyers were already in the dry dock.

McClain: They was up forward of the Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania was in there, but the destroyers were forward of it.

Marcello: You're speaking of the Cassin and the Downes.

McClain: Yes, sir.

Marcello: And as you mentioned, they got destroyed on December 7  
Okay, you couldn't get in dry dock, so you were located where?

McClain: We was alongside a pier, oh, I'd say, 1,500 feet from the dry dock, maybe a little bit farther than that. We was alongside the pier...the Helena was tied up to our

starboard side, and the Saint Louis was tied up to her starboard side.

Marcello: Okay, what did you do that Saturday of December 6, 1941?

McClain: On December 6 there was a boy from my hometown who was on the California, and all the time that we'd been out there...well, he'd been in about two years before I was, but we never was able to see each other because when we was at sea the battlewagon would be in port. That Friday when we came in, the first thing I noticed was that all the battlewagons were there, and, boy, this was odd. Of course, we didn't have communications between ships other than semaphore. So I went up on the bridge, and I had the signalman send a message over to the California to get hold of Kenneth Payne. They got him up there, and I had them to send a message asking him when he had liberty. He said he had it that afternoon. And he said he had liberty the next morning, Saturday morning. So I had the signalman say, "I'll meet you at the sub base at 8:00.

Marcello: That's interesting. All this is communicated back and forth with the semaphore flags.

McClain: Yes, sir. So he said affirmative, so the next morning we went ashore. Well, we got into town--I don't know--I guess, around 9:30 or something like that. Of course, he'd been over there a couple years, a year or so longer than I was, and knew more about it. We went out to

Waikiki Beach and went to the bars and drank some, and we came back to base fairly early. In fact, we were back to the submarine base around 6:00. Well, being that we were supposed to go into dry dock, there were, I guess, seventy-five guys who caught one of the transports back for leave. They were going to go on leave. Well, I begged Kenneth to stay all night with me because we had plenty of bunks and all. He said, "No, I've got to write Mom and wash some clothes. Well, to make the story short, he didn't make it. He got killed on the California the next morning.

Marcello: You mentioned that when you came back, you came back to the submarine base. Was that normally where they let you off?

McClain: They call it the sub base. That was the area where the submarines all tied up. They had a little recreation building there, a restaurant, and you could get coffee and sodas and stuff like that. The motor launches came in for the people going back to the ships anchored out in the bay.

Marcello: So what time did you go to bed that Saturday night?

McClain: Oh, I went to bed, I guess, around 9:00.

Marcello: So, like you mentioned, you'd gone into town and had a few beers or a few drinks and essentially had come back to the ship.

McClain: Yes, sir.

Marcello: Was there anything out of the ordinary happening aboard the ship that night when you came back, or was it a normal Saturday night?

McClain: No, it was just a normal Saturday night. Nothing indicated anything wrong.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that Sunday morning of December 7, 1941, and obviously we want to go into this day in as much detail as you can remember. I'll let you pick up the story at this point. I'm assuming that you're in the sack.

McClain: All right, sir, I always got up early. Reveille went at 5:30, I think it was. I was always up before reveille most of the time. Well, breakfast was at 6:00, and I was always up there to eat breakfast just as soon as they started serving.

Marcello: Now did everybody have to get up on a Sunday morning for reveille?

McClain: No, no.

Marcello: You could sleep in?

McClain: You could sleep in. So I was up, and I went to breakfast. After I got through breakfast I went to topside. Of course, I'm still in the deck division, and, well, you still had to swab that deck down.

Marcello: Well, Sunday was your day to have duty.

McClain: Yes.

Marcello: ...since you had gone ashore the day before.

McClain: So I had the duty, and I swabbed the deck down. It didn't take, oh, thirty-five or forty minutes. Gun four was right close to the quarterdeck, and the quarterdeck was on the port side. I was over on gun three, and I was sitting on the gun platform. One of the members of the boat crew...I don't remember the gig, but, anyhow, it was one of the officers' boats. He was always doing a pantomime or doing something. He'd see a plane, and he'd go like he was diving. He heard this plane. Well, I heard it, too.

Marcello: In other words, he was waving his arms.

McClain: He was waving his arms like a plane, you know. He had tennis shoes on, and he was really limber. We heard the plane, and at the time I didn't realize he was in a dive but he was. All of a sudden, we heard an explosion. Well, it was one of the battlewagons that got it.

Marcello: Did you actually see the plane bomb that ship?

McClain: I didn't see it. I didn't see that particular bomb, no, sir. I heard the plane, and after he dropped the bomb, I knew that he was in a dive because I'd heard planes dive before and pull out. But when he heard that and saw that bomb explode, he just froze.

Marcello: But at that moment, did you know what it was?

McClain: No, I didn't have any idea.

Marcello: Yes.

McClain: In fact, when I stood up and looked over there, I knew

it was a bomb, but the first thing that I thought of that some pilot got in trouble mechanically, had mechanical failure. I thought the plane had went in, is what I thought.

Marcello: Okay, so what happens next?

McClain: Well, the OD [officer-of-the-deck] was on the port side, and he had heard the noise. I ran over there and told him, "I believe a plane crashed over in Battleship Row. And about that time, why, by the time he got over there, well, there were numerous bombs going off then.

Marcello: When does General Quarters sound aboard the Honolulu?

McClain: At that time, when he went through the passageway going over to see what I had reported, he told the bugler to sound General Quarters. We were there on the quarterdeck when General Quarters went.

Marcello: Okay, how were you dressed at the time? Do you recall what you had on?

McClain: I had on undress blues. On Sunday you had to be in a uniform-of-the-day.

Marcello: And it was undress blues?

McClain: Undress blues.

Marcello: Even in Honolulu you wore undress blues?

McClain: Yes, sir.

Marcello: I didn't realize that. Okay, so General Quarters sounds. What do you do?

McClain: When General Quarters sounded, I was on gun one, and I

went up to gun one. Of course, like I said, I was the first loader. The gun captain, a coxswain by the name of Tye was the gun captain. He was a coxswain. He seen a gunner's mate back on gun three or five, and he hollered for a firing pin. Well, we started opening up the ready boxes, and we had ammunition ready but no firing pin. They had to pass the word to the gunner's mate with the day's duty to lay down with the gun locker. He was goofing off down below somewhere. He might have been in the mess hall. I don't know. Well, anyhow, it took some time for him to get down there and unlock the gun locker and issue the firing pin and for a gunner's mate to bring them up and put them it.

Marcello: About how much time elapses at the gun where you were located?

McClain: Well, it seemed like ages. I know it was five minutes, but it seemed like it was ages.

Marcello: In the meantime, what do you see? What's going on?

McClain: Well, we was tied up on our port side, and there is a warehouse along the wharf there. Planes was coming in over us, but at that time they weren't trying to get us at all. They would come over us real low, and they were going in making these runs with torpedo planes on the battleships.

Marcello: How low were those planes coming in?

McClain: Oh, you could see the pilot in the plane just as

distinct as could be.

Marcello: Describe what you saw, that is, relative to the pilot. How were they dressed? What were they doing?

McClain: Well, the pilot had the old-type leather helmet they used to use, and then you could see the weapons they had (I mean, the torpedo planes with the torpedoes aboard). I've heard later that they modified the fin, but I don't remember seeing that. Well, I didn't know that much about them because that was the first time I'd ever seen a torpedo because I was never around the Navy to see them.

Marcello: I'm assuming that the pilots had their canopies pulled back.

McClain: The canopy was partially open. The canopy was partially open, yes. They were getting ready to release their torpedo when they went over us because, like I said, the Helena was next to us, and then the Saint Louis. It wasn't, oh, less than a quarter-of-a-mile from the Saint Louis to the battlewagons.

Marcello: Evidently, you must have had a fairly clear view because you mentioned earlier in your interview that the signalman had been able to use semaphore flags to communicate with the California.

McClain: Oh, yes.

Marcello: What did you see over at Battleship Row? What was going on over there?



McClain: Well, there was so much going on. I was watching the Arizona because they were really pounding her. I was really watching her, and when the one went down the smokestack that did the damage, I knew that she was done.

Marcello: Describe what you saw.

McClain: Well, there was flames. The ship was completely aflame from bow to stern. We'd witnessed...well, I'm speaking of the gun crew I was on. We witnessed people already jumping over the sides. But the smoke and the water. The oil was already aflame on the water. We could see people swimming out. There were a few motor launches that brought the first...well, they were going to have a Mass over on the beach for the Catholic people. The first church party had already been brought over to the docks, and they were returning, and those motor launches were out there trying to pick up people in the water.

Marcello: So they immediately went into action.

McClain: Oh, they went into action.

Marcello: Was there any sort of a loud noise or anything over there when the Arizona blew up?

McClain: Oh, gosh, yes! It was tremendous! It vibrated or shook the whole area.

Marcello: Okay, it takes five, six, ten minutes until you get the firing pins for your weapon. What happens at that

point?

McClain: Well, the firing pins come in, but, like I said, we were next to this warehouse, and we fired...well, the planes came in, and I think we got off about five rounds; and everytime we fired, that old warehouse would jump up. I mean, the percussion would just almost blow it down.

Marcello: So your gun was then on the inboard side of the ship.

McClain: Inboard side, yes. We were restricted because we didn't want to fire into the town. The planes, when they were coming in, you just had a split second before you could...you couldn't train around and get another shot at him. The guys on the starboard side couldn't fire on account of the superstructure of the other two ships.

Marcello: In essence, even under the best of circumstances, how effective would those 5-inch guns have been against airplanes? Under the best of circumstances.

McClain: Well, I'd say with that type of fuse we had, more of them was duds than were effective. They called them proximity fuses. With a proximity fuse, if a shell got within a certain distance of a metal object, it was supposed to detonate and go off. There were more duds than there was live ones.

Marcello: Well, that's what you were talking about awhile ago relative to cutting the fuse. You cut that fuse for a certain height, is that correct?

McClain: See, your gun was controlled by the...the first four

guns were sky forward, and the other four guns were sky aft. They had a range-finder up there, and they had a pointer and trainer. The range-finder would get the altitude and the distance, and it would go through...well, it was electronics.

Marcello: Primitive electronics.

McClain: Yes, sir. You could either shift to automatic, and wherever the director was, the gun would follow; or you could go to manual, and you had a trainer and a pointer on the gun. It was on automatic, but the only thing the guy on the pointer side would do is just press his trigger to complete the circuit.

Marcello: Now let me ask you this, and I'm not sure if this is correct. At that time was this a proximity fuse or was this a time fuse? Doesn't the proximity fuse come later on in the war?

McClain: Well, now maybe..

Marcello: Am I correct?

McClain: Maybe you're right, sir. I believe it was.

Marcello: I think it was called a time fuse.

McClain: That's right.

Marcello: You would cut that fuse to explode at a particular time.

McClain: Yes, you are right, and I'd like to retract that. The time fuse, that's where the range-finder is used. Yes, that's right.

Marcello: Once you got that proximity fuse, you could really do a

number on those Japanese planes, but that was later on in the war.

McClain: Yes, that was later on in the war. When they first came out, they drewed us out of the South Pacific and rushed us up to Alaska to bomb Adak. Before we went up there, they directed us into San Diego, and we took all the time fuses off, and the first load of proximity fuses were put aboard. That's when we found out we had all the duds. But as the war progressed, well, of course, they improved.

Marcello: Okay, so obviously everything is happening fast and furious in that initial wave that comes in.

McClain: Yes, sir.

Marcello: Do you have a full gun crew?

McClain: I had a full gun crew. In fact, liberty hadn't started. Liberty wasn't going to start until 8:00, and the best I remember that's when the Catholic church party had just left the ship; and they hadn't gotten into the dock before this happened, and they come running back.

Marcello: In a situation like that, where you're in battle stations and all that action is taking place, do you do any talking?

McClain: Very little, very little.

Marcello: That's standard procedure, I suppose, is it not?

McClain: Standard procedure. Your gun captain was the boss, and he told you what to do, and you were trained to

automatically know what you had to do even under those conditions. That was our first experience in combat.

Marcello: So he's essentially the only guy who's doing any talking?

McClain: Most of the time, there was so much noise you couldn't have understood him anyhow.

Marcello: And probably he has on the..

McClain: He had earphones on with the forward director, yes.

Marcello: I'm assuming that you were firing or at your gun position during the entire attack.

McClain: Guns two and four were the only ones that fired. We didn't fire but thirty rounds of ammunition on both waves. Then after the torpedo planes got their missions completed, we wasn't bothered anymore until a dive-bomber came in, and he released a bomb on us.

Marcello: Okay, describe that incident. This is in the second wave, and there's kind of a lull, is there not?

McClain: Yes, sir.

Marcello: Okay.

McClain: Well, the dive-bombers came in, and they was bombing things out in the fleet. They were after the Medusa and smaller auxiliary ships out there. They saw us three cruisers sitting over there, and this guy came in and dropped a bomb. Well, it didn't hit the ship. It fell in between the ship and the log that holds the ship away. They call the log the camel. It hit the camel

and exploded, and when it exploded the concussion busted a seam and flooded the number three magazine. We didn't have a casualty, and that was the only damage that we had, was the magazine flooded.

Marcello: Did you see that plane coming in?

McClain: Oh, yes. We fired at it.

Marcello: Describe what you saw. Give me as much detail as you can remember about that.

McClain: The plane came in on an approach similar to the torpedo planes, except he was more on a level flight. He wasn't in no dive. He was moreso in a level flight. Later, I considered what he did was glide-bombing instead of dive-bombing. He just glide-bombed. He released it, and, well, it was just short, that's all.

Marcello: Was he pretty low when he released?

McClain: Oh, yes, yes. He was just barely over the top of the warehouse.

Marcello: Describe how the explosion affected you. In other words, did it shake the ship, or did it knock you off balance or anything of that nature?

McClain: Well, no, it didn't knock us off, but it was enough concussion that the ship jumped up a little bit. But it never knocked anybody down or nothing.

Marcello: I should have asked you this earlier. You're tied up, and you're slated to go into dry dock. In what kind of condition was the Honolulu relative to getting out of

there? In other words, was any of your power plant or anything like that torn down yet? Anything of that nature?

McClain: Nothing was torn down, but what the Japanese did was sabotage the power. We didn't have any power from the docks, and all the boilers was down except in one.

Marcello: But that's normal procedure when you're in port--have all the boilers down except one. That gives you a little bit of power, does it not?

McClain: They can generate enough electricity to take care of you there.

Marcello: I'm assuming, then, that there are efforts made to try and get up enough steam to get out of there.

McClain: Well, of course, that wasn't my department, but I know they did.

Marcello: They did get up steam?

McClain: They got up steam, yes. After the attack was over, after the second wave, the damage control officer reported to the captain that magazine number three had flooded, and they went out on the dock and looked at it. It had a fairly big crack, and it was decided then that we had to have a patch before we could go to sea. The Saint Louis finally got underway, but she was blocked. The Maryland was out in the channel, and at that time they didn't even pull the lines off the Helena. They just let her stay until they got the Maryland free.

Marcello: Now one of the things that I've read...and maybe this will refer to something you said just a moment ago. My understanding was that somebody in the excitement of casting off actually chopped away the power lines. Had you ever heard that story?

McClain: No, sir, I didn't hear that. No, sir, I didn't.

Marcello: Well, nevertheless, you didn't have power for a while, and I'm assuming that probably would have knocked out your lights and your electrical gear and so on. Did it ever reach that stage?

McClain: Well, on our ship it didn't.

Marcello: So you...

McClain: Our hoists had to have power.

Marcello: And it always seemed to work.

McClain: They worked, yes.

Marcello: Let us assume that the last attacking plane has gone. What did you do in the immediate aftermath of the attack?

McClain: Well, we stayed at general quarters. We stayed in general quarters, and we figured that there would be another carrier out there, and they'd launch another wave. And we expected that the island would be invaded.

Marcello: Did you do any talking during this period?

McClain: Oh, yes!

Marcello: What did you talk about?

McClain: We was all so scared we didn't know what we was saying



hardly. It took us two or three hours before we could gain our normal senses back, you know. Then after we seen that there probably wasn't going to be another attack, why, it was, I think, around 2:00 in the afternoon when they said, "Four on and four off. I remember Condition Two or Watch Two, I believe it was. I forget how that watch system worked, but it was four on and four off. But then we went back to general quarters. They called General Quarters because they were supposed to have picked up something. Of course, everybody was on the edge, and I don't recall the radar that was supposed to have picked up enemy planes. We went to general quarters, and it turned out to be birds or something else.

And then that night--oh, I don't know what time it was--why, these B-17s were coming in from the States, and they were supposed to fly down around Diamond Head somehow or another to be recognized; and they didn't do it, and they came in and everything in the fleet opened up on them.

Marcello: I think there were also some planes that came in that night off the carrier Enterprise. Do you recall when those planes were fired upon?

McClain: I remember when the B-17s were fired on. I don't remember about the Enterprise. I've read a tremendous amount of history about Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Describe what the sky looked like when those ships opened up on those planes.

McClain: Well, there was star shells involved, illumination shells. It was just the biggest Fourth of July you ever seen in your life.

Marcello: What were some of the rumors you heard floating around in the aftermath of the attack?

McClain: Well, I can't recall enough to say, but we knew that something was going to happen because we was going to sea and we had ammunition right in the ready boxes. We were going on four hours on and four hours off around the clock. That was several months before the war started.

Marcello: How much sleep did you get that night?

McClain: Well, I had the 4:00 to 8:00 watch that night, and then the next morning you always went to general quarters an hour before sunrise. So I had to be out there, and I went on watch at 8:00. In the meantime I ate breakfast, and I went on watch at 8:00 and stood the 8:00 to 12:00 watch. That night I was back again from 8:00 to 12:00.

Marcello: During this period of time, are you mainly wondering what is going to happen next?

McClain: Yes, sir. We actually expected that the Japanese would have planes developed somehow or another to replenish those planes they had lost, plus turn the ones around that hit us the first time.

Marcello: Could you hear sporadic gunfire that night from time to time?

McClain: Oh, yes--a rifle or a small caliber gun. It was all during the night.

Marcello: Probably one of the safest places that night was to be aboard a ship.

McClain: I'd imagine, yes.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. When things kind of calmed down as much as they possibly could, and you had a chance to look around, describe what you saw in the harbor. Describe the scene that you saw from the Honolulu when you had a chance to look at it.

McClain: Well, the first actual look. I was on the side opposite of where most of the battleships was located. But when I had a chance to get over there and actually look, I could see the Arizona from up on what we called the poop deck. I could look across and see her. But I couldn't see the Maryland and the Utah and the rest of them because the superstructures of the Saint Louis and the Helena had me blocked out there. There was a couple of destroyers sitting back off from the Arizona that I could see. Of course, they had gotten underway right away.

Marcello: Describe what you saw over there at the Arizona. Now you saw it was blown up. What did you see in the aftermath?

McClain: Well, it was just mass confusion. There was boats going in there trying to rescue people out of the water. They had a couple of fire tugs out there that they brought up in there, and they were trying to put the fire out on the water and get that out. Eventually, they started hauling the wounded over to the dock, and they had ambulances there at our stern. They were bringing them up and putting them in that warehouse and waiting for ambulances to get there for them. Then they turned that warehouse into a morgue. Later on in the afternoon, they started bringing the bodies in.

Marcello: What did the surface of the water look like other than the fires?

McClain: Well, it was just a mass of oil, black just like coal.

Marcello: That's a thick oil, is it not?

McClain: It was.

Marcello: They called it bunker oil or something like that.

McClain: I forget what the name was for it, but it was just a crude oil, is the only thing I could say.

Marcello: What did you do in those days following the attack?

McClain: Well, being that the Pennsylvania and the two destroyers was messed up in the dry dock, we couldn't get in. The Saint Louis and the Helena got out and got out to sea. They kept us tied up, and we were there. They were going to bring us away from the dock and bring one of the repair ships in, but we found out later that they

decided somebody else needed it worse than we did. They had plans to get the Pennsylvania out, and we were going to go in. They were going to put us in and drain the dry dock and patch our hole and get us out of there. We weren't in dry dock but two days before they had the hole patched and the water pumped out of the compartment where the magazine was flooded. We were lucky enough to get watertight integrity set so that all the watertight doors down below decks was closed so the whole thing didn't flood.

Marcello: Did your quarters sustain any damage as a result of that bomb?

McClain: No, sir. There was no damage anywhere in the ship. The only thing was that right down below the waterline, about two feet, there was enough concussion to split a seam and let the water in. There wasn't a hole. It was just a seam that split.

Marcello: How did the liberty routine change after the attack?

McClain: You just about forgot about liberty.

Marcello: And when was it that the Honolulu finally got out of Pearl Harbor?

McClain: Well, the attack happened on the 7th, and I think it was around the 13th or 14th, I think, before we ever got out.

Marcello: Of December?

McClain: December, yes.

Marcello: Were there certain temporary repairs made there in Pearl Harbor?

McClain: Yes. Like I said, we went into dry dock, and they cut a plate out and welded a new plate in and reinforced it.

Marcello: And then where did you go from there?

McClain: We went out to join the Saint Louis, the Helena, the Chicago, the Phoenix...well, I forget what task force we were in at the time. At that time we weren't assigned to one of the carrier task forces. They were so mixed up that they were trying to figure out what to do with us, I guess.

Right after we got out there, there was a convoy that needed to be escorted, and they sent the Chicago and the Honolulu and four destroyers or six destroyers-- I forget which--and we steamed back toward the States. We were steaming at thirty-three knots for, I think, about forty-eight hours. When we finally picked up this convoy, I think it was fourteen when we ran into them. Then we joined with twelve more, and we escorted them into Melbourne, Australia.

Marcello: How long did you remain aboard the Honolulu?

McClain: I stayed aboard her until, I believe, November, 1943. Yes, November, 1943.

Marcello: What were some of the actions in which the Honolulu participated in during this period?

McClain: Well, the first actual engagement was up in Alaska at

Adak. It was a chain of islands up there where they found that the Japs that landed in there. They wanted a couple of cruisers. With the weather so bad and the battleships was so slow, they was afraid to bring them up. They sent three light cruisers, and I believe it was the Pensacola and, I guess, Chicago. There were five or six. We weren't up there too long. We sank four or five troopships that we caught in an unloading stage, and we bombarded four or five days straight whenever weather was permissible.

Marcello: I guess with fifteen of those 6-inch guns, you could put out a little bit of firepower.

McClain: Oh, Lord, they'd talk! At that time we had what was the latest weapon system, one of the latest weapon systems out.

Marcello: What other engagements did you participate in with the Honolulu?

McClain: Well, after we got back from Kiska, we were assigned to Task Force 67 I believe that was the first one. It still wasn't with the carrier, though. It was three or four heavy cruisers and about four light cruisers, five or six or maybe eight destroyers. We were patrolling so far latitude north and south or wherever. We were looking for the enemy, is what it was. We had these old SOC-3's. They'd launch them, and they'd go out on scouting missions. Very seldom they ever found

anything, but they were still up there.

Marcello: When did you get off the Honolulu?

McClain: It was in November, 1943.

Marcello: And why did you get off the Honolulu?

McClain: Well, they started rotating. I think I was the second group that got off since the war. The first group was about fifty men. We were coming back into Noumea, and there was an old Dutch steamer in their port, and she was coming back to the States. My orders came in from the Bureau of Navy Personnel. They found out that that ship was coming back, and they had three hundred-and-some litter patients that they were bringing back. She was at Dunkirk when they were run out over there.

Well, anyhow, it was a Dutch crew. They had Javanese cooks on there, but the Navy was supposed to have personnel on there to do our cooking. Well, everybody got aboard, and I didn't have enough time to even clear the ship hardly. I left most of my clothes aboard because I worried less about my clothes. I had enough to get back to the States, and I knew that when I got there they'd have more. I know that when we arrived in Frisco, the only thing I had was what we called an "AWOL" bag--a couple pair of underwear and socks. I had my dress blues and one set of undress blues, and I wore dungarees aboard the old cargo ship. When I got back to the States, well, one of the officers asked me, "Where's



your sea bag?" I said, "Don't you know there's a war going on? There's guys who lost sea bags out there. (chuckle) So they sent me down to small stores and issued me a whole brand-new sea bag.

Marcello: And then where did you go from that point?

McClain: Well, I went to a receiving station there on Treasure Island, and they had right at between 70,000 and 100,000 sailors there. You never saw anything like it in your life. You slept in shifts, ate in shifts, and everything else. You didn't have any idea when or where you was going when you left there, and it was your responsibility to check. They had this bulletin board up. You were in a certain barracks, and they had this bulletin board out there. As they'd get assignments in, why, they'd come out and put them on the board, and it was your responsibility that you would be available for clearing.

You was allowed to go to town, go into Frisco. I believe it was port-and-starboard liberty, like always. But I was more interested in getting out of there. I was there about ten days before my name ever came up. I was a gunner's mate, and my assignment came in to go to a naval air station down at Vero Beach, Florida. Well, I wasn't about to question that part of it because it was cold weather in the Midwest, and that Florida sounded awful good to me. Of course, I didn't have any

idea where Vero Beach was, but it motivated me to hit Florida.

Marcello: And is that where you remained for the rest of the war?

McClain: I remained there for the rest of the war. I went down there, and when I got down there, the leading chief of the installation was one of the first ones that got off the Honolulu. When I reported in there, there were very few regular Navy people there. In fact, most of them were native sons from right around there--bankers and whatnot. They were on Shore Patrol there. Well, anyhow, when I reported in there, and ol' Goins, of course, recognized me as well as I recognized him. He said, "Any job on this base you can have. I said, "Well, you know I'm a gunner's mate. He said, "Yeah, I know it, but you can still have any job you want. But what the base was, after the pilots went through Corpus Christi or Pensacola, they went there for advanced training, and it was determined then if they were going to be a fighter pilot, dive-bomber pilot, or torpedo plane pilot.

Well, they had a bombing lake out there that was thirteen miles around the lake. Out in the center of that lake, they had a bombing target, and they had a flat bottom boat with an aircraft engine on it. I was first class gunner's mate at the time, and they had an NCO and a petty officer out there with two seamen. They

just bombed one day a week, and our job was to be sure that nobody was out there fishing or anything. If there were, we'd run them off. The rest of the time, why, if the pilot or crew hit the target, I had to call in by field radio and tell the people to come down and fix the target. Other than that, why, it was eighteen miles to the base, and I had a pick-up truck. I had one of the seamen go in and get the mail every day and go pick up stuff in the mess hall. We ate like kings. I had an ol' gas refrigerator. Oh, we lived it up.

Marcello: And you were discharged from the Navy there?

McClain: I was sent back to Lambert Field, Saint Louis, in October, 1945, for discharge.

Marcello: And was that the end of your Navy career?

McClain: That was the end of my Navy career.

Marcello: And did you essentially then come back home at that point?

McClain: I came back home, and I couldn't find work because there was nothing here in Cape Girardeau. So I went to Saint Louis. Well, at that time, why, all the war plants were closing down. Oh, there was a few jobs. I got a pretty good job and went to work. About a year after I was working for this place, the last officer in charge that I had down at Vero Beach--he was an electrical engineer--got called in. I was on a street car coming home from work, and he got on the street car. I saw him and I

hollered at him, and he come back there, and he said, "You're the guy I'm looking for. I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I'm looking for a day foreman. I said, "Where's this at?" He said, "Jasper-Blackburn Manufacturing Company. It was a plant that made grounding devices for electrical devices. So I went in there as the day foreman, and I didn't even know what electrical plating was. Of course, he told me, "The chief engineer is also an electrical engineer. So he showed me what it was. Truly, my conscience hurt me because there was guys who had worked there twenty, twenty-five years, and me not knowing nothing, I could hear them talking. I knew they was talking about me. I could hardly hear them, you know, but I knew they were talking about me. Well, I guess I worked down there about three months. I'd been out of the Navy seventeen months. The service was still in my blood.

So there was something that came in to the post office. Mr. Sorflaten, the one who was my last OIC, sent me up to the post office. He told me to go up to the post office and pick up this registered package or whatever it was. So I went and picked it up. Well, of course, it was in the Federal Building, and the recruiting office was also in there. Well, I went in and they said, "Well, we don't need no gunner's mates now.

Well, I'd seen in the paper where the Air Force was about to split from the Army, so I went down to the Air Force and went in. They said, "Well, we can't let you come in as a first class or tech sergeant, equivalent to first class, "but we can have you as a staff sergeant. I thought about this before I went in there. I said, "Now if they want to drop me a grade, and if the Air Force is going away from the Army, they'll be so screwed up when they first get away, why, I'll get that stripe back because I've got the experience. An aviation ordnanceman is equivalent to a gunner's mate, except the Air Corps dealt with small bore guns. So I enlisted and told them, "I want two weeks. So I signed a document that I'd be back in two weeks. It was not binding. He told me, "If you decide you don't want to fulfill this, just give me a call, and I'll forget about it.

Well, I went back down to Sorflaten, and I said, "Well, I'm giving you a notice that I'm going to go in the Air Force. Well, he liked to have had a heart attack when I told him that because I was just getting so that I knew where the left hand was from the right hand. Well, anyhow, I went in the Air Force, and they sent me to Scott Air Force Base unassigned, and I was there a couple of weeks.

I got my first assignment at the air proving ground

at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida. I stayed there for, oh, a couple years, and then I went on a special assignment, what they called a Military Assistance Advisor Group, to Formosa. That's when the Chinese were getting their first military supplies right after they got ran right off the mainland, in fact. We were over there strictly for advisory purposes. We had twelve men on our team, six officers and six enlisted men. I was at a fighter base and had the old F-47 aircraft.

I was there for two years, and then I came back to the States. I made a PCS to Anchorage, Alaska, came back to the States, and did two years at Turner Air Force Base. Then I was transferred from there to Andrews Air Force Base. I was there twenty-seven months and retired.

Marcello: So you, in essence, then did make the military a career.

McClain: Yes.

Marcello: You started out in the Navy and finished in the Air Force.

McClain: And just to bring you a little up to date, I mentioned this Sorflaten. He continued working for Jasper-Blackburn, and they were down in south Saint Louis when I worked for them. Two years after I quit, they moved out in the county. They expanded and moved out in the county, and I was home on leave, and I happened to think about Jasper-Blackburn. I looked in the phone book, and

they were out in Saint Louis County. Well, the reason I was up in Saint Louis was because my mother just had a breast removed, oh, three or four months before, and I took her up to the doctor and had her over to my uncle's house. I got my uncle to go with me, and we went down to Jasper-Blackburn out in the county and ran into Sorflaten. Of course, we reminisced, and he asked me if I was still in the service. I said, "No, I got out. He said, "You know, I thought you were the biggest idiot in the world. He said, "I wished I would have done the same thing. He said, "I've got the same job. I got a little pay raise, but I'm still doing the same thing I did fifteen years ago.

Marcello: Well, Mr. McClain, that's probably a pretty good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for your taking your time to talk to me. You've said a lot of interesting and important things relative to the attack at Pearl Harbor, and I'm sure that students and researchers are going to find your comments most valuable when they get a chance to read them or hear them.

McClain: Well, I'll do anything I can do. I'm a life member of the V.F.W. and a life member of the Air Force Sergeants Association. I'm commander of the local chapter of the D.A.V., and this is where my heart and soul is---Pearl Harbor Survivors Association.

Marcello: Well, again, thank you very much.

McClain: Yes, sir.