

Ben Miller #110
July 26, 1985

Q: Mr. Miller, let me ask you, when did you first join the Army?

A: 1940.

Q: When did you first come to Hawaii?

A: Uh, I came in '40.

Q: Same year.

A: Same year.

Q: When you got here, what were your duties?

A: Well, I was put in line supply and that was with the engine parts and paraphernalia that the pilots wore and all that. That's what we had in our building at the time.

Q: Why don't you describe to me what the period was like leading up to the December 7th attack, if you would. What was your daily routine and that sort of thing?

A: Oh, our daily routine was just being out there on the runway. That's where our building was that we had the line supply in. Then the other outfit, if they wanted to draw engine parts or complete engines, they would come to us. And they'd have requisitions, and then we would get that for them, and take it out to whatever plane they was working on. And that's about all the duty that we had.

Q: Do you recall what you did on Saturday, December 6th; the day before the attack?

A: Yeah, I know what we did. We, every Saturday, had inspection on the runway. The planes were all lined up and about 10:00 we were dismissed. Then you got to go to town or whatever you wanted to do. The rest of the weekend was off.

And that particular day, there was four or five of us from my hometown, we all went to town. And we got home about one in the morning. And then early Sunday morning why, we heard this commotion, and I can remember a couple of them moaning because they thought that the Navy was practicing again, which they did on Sunday mornings.

Well about that time them planes started coming over the building and they dropped them bombs onto the center of the building which was the mess hall. And I don't recall, somebody said 35 cooks were killed right off, and some of the fellows that was closer to the windows looked out the windows and they could see the darn planes not very far above the building. And they wasn't ours so he hollered something, and we all just grabbed pants and what we had and dashed. We were on the second floor, and we went down to the first floor and sure enough, there they

was. So we waited till they went past us. Then we run from the building towards the baseball field.

Well, we got out to the baseball field and here come some more. So we fell down, or laid down, or whatever you might say, and they were strafing around, and they went over us. Then we got up again and we ended up over in the officers quarters, which was next to the water at Pearl Harbor. And we stayed out there probably two hours and it seemed to calm down a little.

Then we went back to where we worked. Well, that was the hangar and it was hit, and we looked out and all the planes were hit. There wasn't one of them that I noticed even got off the ground. There may have been. I don't know of any that got off the ground. They were all hit.

But I do remember how low the planes were. They weren't more than 20 feet at the most over the top of the building and you could look and see a guy in the plane. And it was pretty scary and at that time there was nobody shooting back at them because the armament was taken out of the airplane on Friday night and put into the armament building, and then the planes were just sitting there. That's about all I remember and...

Q: What did you do afterwards?

A: Afterwards, you mean later in the night?

Q: Well, after the attack was over.

A: After it was over, we came... well, like I say, we came back to the hangars and there wasn't nothing to do over there. There was nothing to do anything with, and everybody was running wild. So, like I say, our bunch got together and we were sort of... we seen guys laying, but being new to that... I didn't stop. We didn't stop. And see there was other fellows there and so we kept going. And I know that the majority of the officers got their wives out of their shacks that they were living in and they went back to town. But we all stayed there, and we ended up that night out in the hangar with machine guns that had been set up by personnel that knew what they were doing. We didn't know anything about guns. But we were out there in the hangar, but nothing happened after the... nothing happened that evening.

Q: Must have been pretty tense though.

A: Very what?

Q: Pretty tense.

A: Yeah, it was. It was. And I don't know what happened to the fellow four beds from me. I don't know what happened. His name was Maddocks(??) and I don't know.... there had to be a shell or something, strafing come through there. He never got out of bed and I can remember hollering at him, and the other fellow from my home town hollered at him to come on and get out of here. And we got down to the bottom and out and he wasn't there, but there was no stopping because they were there. And he had got killed in bed. He never got out of bed. But, that's about all I can say.

Q: What were you feeling, you know? What were you thinking

while all this was going on?

A: Well, there wasn't much time to think of what was going on. We didn't know what was going on. We didn't know why this was happening or what. I, myself, didn't know what was going on. Everybody was running and getting out of there and saying that the Japanese were attacking us and we better get out of there.

I can remember Sgt. Larson. He was on the floor below, and I... the first one I heard I thought was him, hollering. He must have been up or... but I can remember him hollering upstairs to get out of the building. But when that shell lit in the mess hall, our wing was right on the corner, and the mess hall, as you know was right in the center. It wasn't very far from us. And that's when the building emptied.

And we later found out that we... I don't know how many men we lost. The number is weird. You can hear twelve and you can hear fifteen. But when they run outside, there was trees and shrubbery next to the building, and they got in behind them, where the rest of us took off and run across the street through the baseball field. And these guys that got behind a shrub... it was 8 or 10 of them got killed out of our outfit that didn't never got away from the shrubs. I don't know, some guy said 8 and some said 10. I can't remember which is right. But they stopped and got in there and we kept going.

And we spent that night over at the officers quarters which they were all empty so the enlisted men just got so many in every one what would hold and we stayed there that night.

Then the next morning, we went back to the runway and seen the damage that was done and...

Q: What did that look like?

A: Well, that was the part of the... where we worked, that's the first part that we went to. We wanted to go where we worked so we went there first and whole side of the building was gone. Where there was windows, that was all gone. You could... there was nothing there and the planes were right out from us lined up like they did every weekend and some of them was really strafed a lot more than the others. But we seen them strafing the runway, and they weren't...oh, footage gets me... I would say they were 50 feet above the ground coming down there because there was nobody shooting back. They didn't have to worry about that. Nobody was prepared for that. But that's about all I can remember of seeing out there.

Q: O.K., well, I thank you for your time.

A: That's fine. Fine. Glad... (tape ends)