

Donald Englund #95
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Q: Mr. Englund, let me start off by asking you, when did you first join the Army?

A: 1940. November of 1940. November 20.

Q: How did you come to be put in the [Army] Air Corps?

A: Well I specifically enlisted to go to Hawaii as an Army Air Corps member.

Q: When did you first come to Hawaii?

A: December 11, 1940.

Q: So that's almost a year to the day. Almost a year before the attack.

A: Just under a year, yes.

Q: What were your duties?

A: At that time I was working maintenance around the... they had a Base technical school where they were training people for aircraft mechanics and they also had an armament school there. And I had gone through the school and happened to be assigned to an airbase squadron. So that we had no aircraft and they put me over there at the school doing maintenance; general maintenance around there.

Q: On the grounds and that sort of thing?

A: Well, it was not much ground work being done by us. They were like, any lawn mowing and that was done probably by duty rosters. But this was, in fact we have a desk where we would take the varnish off and refinish and do all kinds of things.

Q: I see. What was your daily routine like just before the December 7th attack?

A: Well about two weeks prior to the attack there was some thought I suppose that there would be a lot of sabotage going on in the Islands. They knew that there was something in the air I'm sure. So I happened to be working at the school. In fact they shut down the school; the classes were terminated because of this impending event I guess. Not that anyone mentioned that they thought it would happen but they did suspend the school about two weeks before then. And uh, I had for those two weeks, had carried a side arm. So they were expecting possible trouble with Japanese Nationals living around there I would think was the reason for us being armed.

Q: Was there some kind of intensified guard duty, uh, patrols around the area?

A: Well, they were training a good many people for air... they call it ground defense is what they call these people. They were assigned that duty and they were I suppose being instructed in the use of machine guns and those things.

Q: And where were you when the attack began?

A: Well, I was at uh, like I say, for two weeks prior to that we had been on alert... certain people. And I had been on duty the night before until oh, midnight. And I was up at 7 then and I fortunately, I cleared the mess hall before the bombs hit the mess hall. And the place where we had our headquarters was over at where the school was; the technical school. So I was there and nobody was expecting it, and suddenly we saw aircraft that we knew weren't our own or that they had to be something different than we ever saw before, and I guess everyone instinctively knew that we were being attacked by the Japanese because you could see their red insignia on the side.

Q: What was the first thing that happened that made you realize that Hickam was under attack?

A: But we did hear some explosions but right away we knew by the pattern of their flight that... We were in a position where you could see planes going over Pearl Harbor and you could see there were torpedoes hanging under them. They were so slow moving it seemed like they just like they were suspended there. If we'd have had enough air defense there, I'm sure we could have inflicted a lot of casualties on the planes.

So after we knew we were under attack, prior to that, the night before, they had brought over ten .50-caliber machine guns for anti-aircraft use. They had a high tripod and they were water cooled guns. And uh, I had never been in armor, but apparently, when you worked the job I had, they thought you were a jack-of-all-trades, so they had me clean these guns up. They were all in Cosmoline the barrel extensions, and parts that needed to be protected from rust and so forth. And so I had cleaned these guns up and assembled them so that they would be available for use.

Q: Did you see the flight line or the hangars get hit?

A: I saw almost everything being hit from the place where we set up our defenses was on the baseball diamond right across the street from the school was a baseball diamond. And you could see when they hit the barracks and everything it went up the whole roof you could see was a flame. Apparently it ignited anything combustible, and there were fires all over.

Q: What about the aircraft that were parked on the field?

A: They were basically destroyed. They had aluminum apparently when they got that intense fire like that, it was almost as though they evaporated. The only thing that would be left would be like your steel parts. But any magnesium alloy parts like your ... you know the power section of your engines and all those things were magnesium alloy, they burn. So the cylinders and stuff like that would be there but it was almost totally... that

is a big part of them; some of them naturally didn't completely... but they were all... practically all destroyed.

Q: Did these .50-caliber machine guns get into action?

A: Yes. As soon as we knew we were under attack, they distributed them around the Base and we kept one there and set that up. One of the officers in charge of personnel there at the school shot down one Zero with that gun I know that. And we happened to have a rifle rack there which was locked and I knew we needed guns, so I did go and get permission to open it. I just took a wrecking bar and there was a hatchet I took and broke the lock and we got some guns and I shot up about two bandoleers of ammunition. I don't know if I got anybody but I saw one go down. He went right into the Hawaiian Air Depot Hangar. The big hangar there? And uh, who got him I don't know but it felt good to see him go down when you're shooting at them.

Q: Do you remember which direction you first saw the Japanese planes coming from at the beginning of the attack?

A: Actually, the first one I saw was actually going.... making a run at Pearl Harbor as though he had come in, not over the pass like the planes had come, he must have come back in there to make his run. The first one I saw wasn't going in the direction that the main attack was supposedly from. But after awhile they were milling around pretty much, because they were strafing at everything. But apparently the first planes came in, in some kind of formation which I think had passed before I had one in my vision.

Q: What's the most vivid memory of any single incident in the attack?

A: I think the thing that was... I don't know that it was but I thought... it probably was when the Arizona was hit; the impact of that sound wave. I thought they had struck an oil tank. I thought, well, they're going after the fuel because I saw the big black smoke come up, and that smoke was visible for a long time after that. It took a long time for that to burn off and I'm sure that had to be what I heard, although I didn't... I couldn't see the Arizona but after the attack was over, I'm sure that's what I heard.

Q: Excuse my I think somebody... (pause) Do you happen to recall what time it was when you heard the impact of the Arizona explosion?

A: I would have thought it was probably... it seemed like it was not too long after I first noticed the attack. I think they said it was 7:55 that the attack took place. But I would have thought it was ten minutes or more after... maybe longer than that. But time is hard to estimate after that length of time. But it was a little while after the attack began that I was aware of it.

Q: Did you take part in any of the clean up there at Hickam.

A: Quite a bit of it, yeah. That's one thing about an airbase squadron; that's their duty. So we cleaned up quite a bit of the stuff. In fact I scratched my arm on some of the

Q: Talking about scratching your arm.

A: Apparently all this metal that had been burned and broken up into parts; I scratched my arm and it seemed as though I got a kind of an infection. Scars gone now but it took a long time for it to heal. I don't know if there's something in that material that caused it to be infected, but I didn't have to be hospitalized or anything. But it did have a bad scratch from it and it uh... that was some days after the attack though.

We didn't, at least I didn't, do any clean up at that time because it was about a week or so that we were left at the duty we had. In fact I was put on a machine gun after that... a .50, which was located in the officers quarters. They had evacuated the women so we were using an officers home as our you know, headquarters for this gun emplacement. Col. Ferguson, who used to be the morale officer I believe, at Hickam Field assigned me to that gun duty there. In fact, that was the first time I met him so... (laughter).

So I was there until things were pretty stable. Then I went back to my squadron. It didn't take too long to restore the barracks to where you could stay in it. You know, they did a little bit of cleaning the mess up and making it habitable; even though it had been, some areas I guess weren't.... because there were large holes in the floors where bombs had burst inside the building. So...

Q: O.K., well thank you.

A: Yeah.

Q: I appreciate your coming by to share your time with us.