

Everett Gustafson #105

July 26, 1985

Q: Mr. Gustafson, why don't you start from the time you first joined the Service.

A: Well, I joined the Service in 1940 and arrived at Hickam Field that year, and was working as a mechanic at the.... I belonged to the 14th Bomb Squadron. Then later when the 14th Bomb Squadron was split up, one half of it being sent to the Philippines, I was transferred to the 26th Bomb Squadron.

And at the time I came to Hawaii, there were five fellows from our home town that enlisted together, three of them at Wheeler Field and two of us were assigned to Hickam Field. But on the day of the attack, all five of us were at Hickam Field attending school.

Uh, previous to the time of the attack, while we had been going to school, about two weeks before that, roughly speaking, they had pulled us off of that, and those of us that had had ground defense training was assigned to the ground defense around the Hickam Field. The main purpose was to protect underground installations such as telephone communication lines and so forth.

And in the week previous to the attack, my place of duty was on the parade ground right to the east of the barracks, and my job was to patrol that area, carrying a shot gun or a rifle (rifle most of the time) and to watch so that there was no one interfering or getting near the manhole covers in that area.

But on the evening previous to the attack, a friend of mine from back home and I were assigned to a pick up truck and we had .30-caliber machine gun and we were supposed to be on ready alert in case there was any sabotage around the field. We were supposed to go in that truck to any position where they needed help.

And this buddy and mine, course, being everyone knew, or thought that war was eminent in that area, we spent the evening from approximately 8 until 12:00 discussing WWI. And his, the buddy's father had been in WWI, so we had exchanging a lot of stories on things we had read.

About 12:00 at night we were relieved of our duties in this pick up truck and were assigned to patrol the tent area for about two hours, from about 12:00 until 2, and at that time we were equipped with 12-gauge shotguns and we patrolled the area for about two hours and then we went to bed.

And he and I slept in adjoining beds and the next morning at about 7:55 you heard a loud explosion. We rushed to the outside of the tent, which probably held 20-24 men and there was a plane flying over towards the Harbor. Of course, there had already been an explosion. There was plane with the red circle flying towards the Harbor making a bomb run.

The fellows all rushed back into their tents, grabbed their .45's and grabbed their shot guns and proceeded to shoot at other planes coming in. Although most of them were out of range, especially for a shot gun. But you could clearly identify the pilots and the plane.

And meanwhile, the first bomb hit. Apparently, it was either at the fire station near the barracks at Hickam Field or the HAD [*Hawaiian Air Depot*] hangar. I mean from our position, in this tent city, it was a little bit hard to say. I've always heard it was HAD hangar. Some fellows insist that the fire station received the first direct hit.

Some other planes came over and there was a wooden building in this tent area. We stood behind it when the plane came in strafing, and I don't think he actually strafed the tent area though.

And then they came up with a couple of trucks and we were loaded into the trucks and transported across the air field in the midst of the first attack. And there they dropped us off, scattered us through the area directly across from the hangar area. There was one Buck Sgt. there had us disperse across the area, told us to keep our heads down. But we were in such a good position to see what was going on that we sat rather upright in this short grass, not realizing that all the whizzing sounds that were going past us were pieces of shrapnel, either from bombs exploding or from our own artillery.

And so we were out there in that area for the duration or most of the first and second attack, and even when the horizontal bombers came over, you could look up to the planes and actually see the bombs being released from the planes before they gained speed and landed on the airfield.

We stayed out in there until after the attack, all afternoon, later that evening, they brought us in to the area north of Hickam Field near the Pearl Harbor area and gave us sandwiches for the evening, and we had a chance to talk to some of our buddies about what had transpired, and to find out who'd been killed and so forth.

Later on, from then on, I was assigned to protecting the area beyond the airfield and seldom left it for the couple of weeks before our Squadron moved up to Wheeler Field just previous to Christmas of that year.

But that's basically... in other words, I had a birds-eye view of everything that was going on. I can't remember all the details but it's a unforgettable sight.

Q: Do you recall how you were feeling at that time, while it was going on?

A: Astonishment, I suppose. Really not a great deal of fear because we had no idea of the dangers involved and we didn't see, from our area, we didn't see the fellows were being slaughtered. So, I mean, it was a big show; something different, and we didn't realize the seriousness of the damage at that time.

Q: What did the scene on the hangar line look like right after the attack?

A: Well, from what we could see, it was smoke, confusion. We were a little bit too far away to really see just what was taking place, but just smoke, and debris, and confusion. I mean trucks going everywhere. About that time they were moving into the area, the artillery outfits were moving into their guns. We were, our primary purpose at that time was to keep our eyes out for anyone coming in from the sea, because they more or less passed word along, that they expected an invasion after the attack. And that was our job, to repel any invaders, if they came ashore.

Q: Must have been pretty tense.

A: Right. It was very tense, yes.

Q: A lot of rumors going around?

A: Well, we weren't near... at that time we weren't near enough to anyone else to hear any rumors. But uh, probably towards evening, we began to hear rumors of the parachute landings and landings on our different Islands; different things, which no one, I don't think, really believed. But I mean, there was a lot of rumors floating around later on. But that particular day there was not, no. But I mean we were told to just watch because they expected that something would happen.

And we did watch as one B-17 tried to take off and... but we could see both the dive bombers, and the torpedo bombers, and the horizontal bombers from our position. In fact, one plane in particular, I know came in and strafing, and he was flying well below the height of the hangars when he came down across the field; very low.

Uh, earlier, I know that there was another one on the east end of the airfield that came whizzing in from the south and he opened up his guns and it looked as though he was trying to strafe troops rather than equipment.

Q: What direction did most of the planes seem to come from?

A: I don't know. To me, it seemed like they were coming from the west. The horizontal bombers were crossing from the west to the east direction. The others, I don't know, seemed like they were coming in from all directions though. I mean I really couldn't distinguish... I really couldn't remember that.

Q: What's your most single vivid memory of that day?

A: Well, I suppose it was the initial explosion, the initial sight of the plane with the red circle on it. I imagine it was such a... you knew instantly what it was, because after all, from reading the papers and realizing how tense things were in the Pacific, in a way, there was no surprise, in a way there was a surprise.

But of course, the higher commands seemed obsessed with sabotage defense, and previous to that we had had our planes dispersed. And a few months earlier when we had... we had, had training, insofar as we'd had our planes dispersed over the field.

But this particular time, they had been dispersed, they moved them back to the hangar lines. However they kept those of us on ground defense patrolling the area. So, I mean, we were not... we were still on alert as far as the ground defense forces were concerned. And that was comprised mainly of fellows that had had ground defense training that were at school... at the mechanic school at that time.

Q: Well, thank you very much. I appreciate your taking the time to talk to me.

A: Mmhmm.