

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

#281

FRANCIS MACK

HICKAM FIELD

**INTERVIEWED ON
DECEMBER 8, 1998
BY JEFF PAPPAS**

TRANSCRIBED BY:

CARA KIMURA

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Jeff Pappas (JP): ...oral history interview was conducted by Jeff Pappas for the National Park Service, USS *Arizona* Memorial, at the Imperial Palace Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada on December 8, 1998 at four p.m. The person being interviewed is Francis Mack, who was at Hickam Field on December 7, 1941. Frank, for the record, would you please state your full name, place and date of birth?

Francis Mack (FM): Francis L. Mack. I was born in Rockville, Connecticut, the tenth of April 1920.

JP: Did you grow up in Connecticut?

FM: Yes, I did.

JP: Tell me about growing up in New England in the 1920's and early thirties.

FM: Well, it was a good time up until '29. With the crash, why, things changed radically for everyone. And we went through the depression of the thirties and it was tough going all around.

JP: What did your father do?

FM: Well, he was a real Yankee tradesman, horseman, or whatever. He sold real estate. He was a bootlegger. He—one day I came home while he was selling real estate and [we] lived on three-quarters of an acre of land and here's the yard full of a couple of horses, about five cows, some farm equipment. He had sold a farm and that was his commission. So I wound up for about a week or so milking cows, which I never knew anything about.

And another time I came home and we had about five or six cars on the front yard that he was trying to sell. He'd made another deal. So he was a real Yankee clipper.

JP: So he was a real Yankee, meaning he was a...

FM: Oh yeah.

JP: ...he was a very...

FM: He even promoted a Dempsey fight at one time.

JP: Jack Dempsey?

FM: Yes he did, yup.

JP: Was this in Connecticut?

FM: Yes. Yes.

JP: Very good. Did Jack Dempsey fight in Connecticut?

FM: Yeah.

JP: Where did he fight?

FM: On Snipsic Lake. I don't know who he fought, but I remember that.

JP: Was it Hartford?

FM: No, over in Snipsic Lake. They had a pavilion there or something at the time, no longer there but they did at that time. We're talking about in the twenties now.

JP: Your dad sounds like a really crafty kind of guy.

FM: Oh, he was. (Chuckles) He was. I'm not like him at all.

JP: What was your dad's full name?

FM: Frank Clayton Mack.

JP: How about your mother? Tell me about your mother.

FM: My mother was Polish. She came over from Warsaw in, oh, I guess it was probably 1912 or something like that. Yeah. And her name was—let's see

(chuckles) that's a hard one. Francesca [S.] Ciechowski. C-I-[E]-C-H-O-W-S-K-I, I can always spell it.

JP: Did you have any siblings? Any brothers or sisters?

FM: One brother, yeah, no longer living.

JP: Was he older or younger brother?

FM: Yeah, he was a little bit older, about eighteen months older than me.

JP: What did you like to do in Connecticut when you were growing up as a kid?

FM: What did I do?

JP: What did you like to do? What were some of your favorite things to do?

FM: Well, swimming mostly, and skating in the wintertime, of course. We used to make our own skis out of barrel staves and tried to get down the hills and break our necks and so forth.

JP: Yeah, Connecticut wasn't exactly the skiing capital of the world.

FM: No. Oh no. I remember an ice storm one time that I put on a pair of skates. We lived high on a hill, about a mile out of town and it went down real steep. I put the skates on, I wound up in town. It was terrific. (Laughs) I think I almost got killed! (Laughs) Yeah.

JP: Did you go to grammar school, high school in Connecticut?

FM: I went to a parochial school in Rockville, a Catholic school, St. Bernard's.

JP: Mm-hm.

FM: And then, high school, completed that in '37.

JP: And a Catholic high school as well?

FM: No. No, no. Just a public school.

JP: In Rockville?

FM: In Rockville.

JP: In Rockville.

FM: Yeah.

JP: Now, where's—and locate Rockville for me.

FM: Well, seventeen miles northeast of Hartford.

JP: All right, so heading toward the Massachusetts...

FM: Yes.

JP: ...border.

FM: Yeah, right.

JP: Okay. So what did you do in high—did you participate in the athletics or sporting...

FM: Played baseball and played a little basketball. We didn't have a football team at that time.

JP: And so when did you decide to join the service?

FM: Well, I had the notion that I wanted to fly.

JP: The notion you wanted to fly?

FM: Yeah. When I was about fifteen or so and my mother got me a contact lens—I have a bad right eye. In 1938, she got me a contact lens from Zeiss, in Germany. And with that, I wore it for about a year, so in '39, I enlisted in the Army Air Corps. And I got to Hickam Field and I passed the cadet

exams. Come to the physical and they spotted the contact lens in my eye. And they tried to get a waiver, but they wouldn't accept it at the time. They had too many people that had good eyes and so forth.

JP: So that was to become an aviator though?

FM: Yeah, to fly.

JP: You were trying to become an aviator?

FM: Trying to fly, yeah.

JP: What was the impetus, the inspiration behind aviation at that time?

FM: I guess I was fascinated with airplanes, probably, more than anything.

JP: Did you play with planes as a kid? Did you make some models?

FM: Oh yeah. Yeah, a few.

JP: We had one of your colleagues [*who*] had been interested in Lindbergh, Charles Lindbergh's career.

FM: Uh-huh.

JP: He had followed it. That was his inspiration...

FM: Yeah.

JP: ...to become a naval aviator. Had that entered your thinking?

FM: It probably did. I'm sure it did, sure.

JP: Well, what other options did you have in Connecticut back in the 1930's, after high school?

FM: Well, it was factory work to do. I worked in [*a*] woolen mill for a little while. There was always the tobacco farms. People don't know about those

tobacco farms, but there's a lot of them there. There was, anyway. And during the course of my being in high school, why, our summers were spent on those farms, you know, working in the tobacco fields, and so forth.

JP: What sort of factory work?

FM: Well, it was woolen mill.

JP: Oh.

FM: The woolen mill.

JP: Is this off the Connecticut River? I don't know my geography as well as I should.

FM: Well, once again, Hartford, the Connecticut River runs through Hartford, so we're still seventeen miles away from it, you see. Yeah.

JP: So mostly wool and textiles?

FM: Yeah.

JP: So you did have some options. There was...

FM: Oh yeah.

JP: Was there some work in Connecticut at that time?

FM: Not a whole lot, really. Not a whole lot. If you had connections, you could get into the insurance business or, you know, go to work for Aetna or Travelers or some of the big outfits there.

JP: But of course, in the midst of the Great Depression...

FM: That's right.

JP: How did that affect your family?

FM: Not too bad. Not too bad. As I said, my father was a provider (chuckles) and we made it okay. We didn't get hurt much. Yeah.

JP: So you enlisted?

FM: Right, December 6, 1939.

JP: December 6, how interesting.

FM: One day—I had my two years in, [*to the*] day we got the attack. I only enlisted for two years, to see if I could make cadet, you see.

JP: I see, that was the...

FM: At that time, you could do that.

JP: ...two years, so you're essentially, then, your stint was up...

FM: Yes.

JP: ...on December 6...

FM: Yes.

JP: ...1941.

FM: Yeah.

JP: So you enlisted in—was it Hartford?

FM: Yeah, yeah.

JP: And you went off to your next destination.

FM: That was Fort Slocum. And there, believe it or not...

JP: And where is Fort Slocum?

FM: In New York. New York. In the bunk next to me—we only stayed there a few nights—was James Jones, who wrote “*From Here to Eternity*”. And we palled together, over through California. We went to Fort McDowell from Slocum, through the Panama Canal. And then, when we got to Hawaii, why, he was assigned to the same outfit I was for about a month in the Army Air Corps. But he didn’t like the lack of discipline, believe it or not...

JP: Of the air corps?

FM: Army Air Corps, yeah. We were kinda loose at that time.

JP: As compared to the regular army?

FM: Oh yeah, yeah. Well, you fly with the crew, you’d better be part of it, you know.

JP: Your colleagues had described the Air Corps as being the glamour boys.

FM: Well, it was at that time, sure.

JP: Glamour, would you—why was it glamorous?

FM: Well you were flying. Big deal. You were flying, you see.

JP: So you had met the author of “*From Here to Eternity*”. He was a bunkmate of yours at Fort Slocum.

FM: Yeah.

JP: Did you get to know Mr. Jones?

FM: Oh yeah, we palled together for a few weeks, I guess.

JP: So did he ever talk to you about writing or...

FM: No. The impetus for him there, I understand, came from his adoptive mother. She encouraged him to write because she knew he could,

apparently. But at that moment, I don't think he was even thinking about writing.

JP: Okay.

FM: Yeah.

JP: So from [*Fort*] Slocum, you left Slocum.

FM: Yeah.

JP: And you went to...

FM: We got on the [*USAT*] *ST. MIHIEL*, an old army transport. Went through the Panama Canal and believe it or not, I was on K.P. Christmas Day, going through the Panama Canal, so I didn't even hardly see it.

JP: So that was Christmas Day, nineteen...

FM: Thirty-nine.

JP: ...1939. So you didn't see the Panama Canal?

FM: Hardly. Very little of it.

JP: How did you, how did the crew celebrate Christmas on board ship? What sorts of activities did you engage in?

FM: I don't remember. I was on K.P., so I don't know what they were doing, really.

JP: So you don't have any sorts of ceremonies or services?

FM: Not that I remember.

JP: Just another day.

FM: That's right. We were on the road.

JP: On the road. You went through Panama, you hadn't had the chance to even see the canal?

FM: That's right.

JP: How much traveling had you done before your stint in the service?

FM: Not a whole lot. Locally in New England, Boston and you know, up to Maine, so forth, Bar Harbor and places like that. Not a whole lot, really.

JP: So this was quite a journey for you...

FM: Oh, this was the trip of a lifetime.

JP: The traveling, was that something you had thought about when you enlisted or was that something that wasn't part of your equation for joining?

FM: Not really. Not really a part of it, really. I was really interested in getting into a cadet program.

JP: That was the cadet program for...

FM: Flying.

JP: ...flying.

FM: Yeah.

JP: That was your motivation.

FM: Yeah.

JP: So now you're heading through Panama and from there you go to...

FM: Fort McDowell in San Francisco Bay.

JP: Okay.

FM: Yeah.

JP: And you stayed there for?

FM: Probably ten days at most. And then we shipped over to Honolulu, to Hawaii.

JP: How much—had you liberty time in San Francisco?

FM: Yeah, we had a few days off, as I remember, 'cause I remember riding the ferryboat over to the Presidio, which was right across the harbor there. But I don't remember much about San Francisco really.

JP: No?

FM: Yeah.

JP: Didn't spent too much time in the city?

FM: We didn't have any money to do anything with.

JP: What was the salary? What was your salary?

FM: Twenty-one dollars a month, yeah.

JP: So what sorts of skills had you learned thus far on the ship? What were you doing aboard ship there? Were you working in the boiler room, or doing...

FM: No, just the usual, whatever they called us to do. Sometimes a little bit of K.P. or exercises. We did exercises most everyday. And getting seasick of course, part of the time. Sure.

JP: What was your rank at this time?

FM: Private.

JP: Still a buck Private.

FM: Oh yeah. Yeah. This is all happening within about two months, you know.

JP: Oh yeah. It's just from leaving [*Fort*] Slocum and getting to San Francisco.

FM: Sure.

JP: Yeah. So from San Francisco, you guys headed to...

FM: Honolulu.

JP: What did you think of that?

FM: Oh boy. (Chuckles) It was a great place. (Chuckles)

JP: Great place. Specifically, what was so great?

FM: The weather. The weather mostly was great. Yeah.

JP: So you sort of left behind those New England winters.

FM: Oh, you bet.

JP: And now you're in the midst of a paradise.

FM: Yeah.

JP: What did you do there?

FM: When I first was turned to duty, well it was supposed to be basic training. When they looked at my record, they saw that I'd graduated from high school, I could type. And at that moment, there was a process going on called command post exercises. They called my name and sent me up to headquarters as a typist.

JP: They chose this for you?

FM: Oh yeah.

JP: You didn't have any choice in the matter?

FM: No, no. I had to go.

JP: So it was an assignment? You were assigned...

FM: So I missed basic training totally. I never had a day of it, yeah.

JP: So you, what did you do there?

FM: Typed, just typed.

JP: For who?

FM: Whatever was coming through, reporting on—this was the command—we called it a command post exercise and what was happening, I really don't remember. But it was an exercise to protect the islands, I'm sure. You know.

JP: So you're basically handling correspondence...

FM: That's right.

JP: ...for the officer corps?

FM: Yeah, I suppose. Sure.

JP: Or for anything, or for whatever...

FM: Yeah, everybody.

JP: ...they wanted you to do. Where was this located?

FM: In the headquarters building at Hickam. I think we were on the second floor.

JP: That's Hickam Field?

FM: Yeah, Hickam Field, right.

JP: So, getting back to Hawaii now. What did you do on your free time?

FM: Oh, a lot of beaching. We'd go swimming and so forth. We didn't have any money to do a whole lot with. And I remember buying a beer and that was a—boy, that was a real thrill, to be able to buy a beer, you know. We had canteen checks at the time. Then you could draw them and then you had to pay it back at payday, you know, and so forth. And I didn't use too many of those, but that's what we had.

JP: Were you a letter writer?

FM: Yeah. I was, I wrote quite a few letters home.

JP: Have you ever saved or kept any of those letters?

FM: I haven't seen one.

JP: No.

FM: I haven't seen any of 'em.

JP: Before you left Connecticut, had you been involved with any special female person?

FM: Yeah, my wife. We've been married for fifty-odd years.

JP: So you were married prior to your departure?

FM: Yes.

JP: Oh, so you married before you—were you married before you went into the service?

FM: Yes.

JP: Oh.

FM: They didn't know that. I never said a word about it and they never...

JP: Let's go back to that.

FM: ...and they never asked me!

JP: They never asked you if you were married?

FM: No. Yeah.

JP: So you were a young man when you married.

FM: That's right.

JP: Nineteen...

FM: Nineteen years old.

JP: Who did you marry and where?

FM: In Hartford.

JP: In Hartford. Who did you marry? What was her name?

FM: Louise Buser, B-U-S-E-R. She's Swiss, both sides. She's here with me today.

JP: How many married men were with you onboard?

FM: Oh, I believe there were three of 'em, three others besides me.

JP: And they never asked.

FM: Never asked, nope.

JP: So you're at Hickam now and this is 1940?

FM: Yeah.

JP: You spent most of your time in Hawaii stationed at Hickam Field?

FM: Yeah, all of it.

JP: All of it?

FM: All of it, yeah.

JP: Now, what happened to your ambition to become an aviator, a cadet?

FM: Well, after that, I still wanted to fly, knowing that I couldn't qualify as a pilot, I went to tech school out there.

JP: You couldn't qualify as a pilot?

FM: Because of my eyes.

JP: That's right.

FM: Yeah.

JP: You had that contact lens. Just one contact lens?

FM: Just in my right eye. It's about that big.

JP: And that was...

FM: It covers the whole eye.

JP: And your mother had gotten that from Germany?

FM: Yeah.

JP: Had she gone over there?

FM: From Zeiss—no. We, through an optometrist in Hartford, they sent over for it. They took the measurements and so forth and sent over there for it. They were the only ones making them at the time.

JP: Contact lenses?

FM: Yeah.

JP: How interesting.

FM: I've still got it. It's about that big.

JP: So at this time, when you had made it known that you wanted cadet training, they had discovered...

FM: Yeah.

JP: What was the criterion by which to become a cadet?

FM: You had to have perfect eyesight. Yeah. And of course you passed a battery of tests, physically and mentally, you know.

JP: How large was the Air Corps out of Hickam at that time?

FM: I would say less than 3,000. I believe it was less than 3,000. That's a guess. That's a guess, really.

JP: Would you consider that small or large?

FM: It was small at the time. Yeah.

JP: What kind of aircraft at Hickam?

FM: They had Martin B-10's. They had the B—what the heck was it? B-12's.

JP: Mm-hm.

FM: B-18's, the old Boeing B-18, and then these B-17's came in, of course, during the time of the attack. Yeah.

JP: So what did you do after this. You had been, obviously, you were somewhat disappointed.

FM: Well, I worked as a clerk in the orderly room for about six or seven months and then I decided to go to tech school, and I did that.

JP: You decided to go to tech school?

FM: Yeah.

JP: Was that something...

FM: I asked for it. I asked for it, yeah.

JP: Now, what's tech school?

FM: Well, this is aircraft maintenance and so forth.

JP: Okay.

FM: Yeah.

JP: How long did you do that for? How long did you train for?

FM: Well, I think it was two months, a two-month course. Yeah, very intensive and very good.

JP: The training, did that cover the entire aircraft, or just specific parts of the aircraft?

FM: Oh yeah, tail to nose. Engine and all, yeah.

JP: You feel as though you had an adequate training?

FM: Oh yeah.

JP: You knew all the aircrafts that were part of Hickam at that time, or did you train on specific sorts of aircraft?

FM: Well, mostly the B-18, which was our big aircraft at that time.

JP: Mm-hm.

FM: Mostly that, really.

JP: So that's, you eventually fall into that as...

FM: I flew one flight in the old B-18.

JP: You flew?

FM: Yeah, well as a crewmember.

JP: Mm-hm.

FM: Yeah. After I got out of tech school, why then I became a flight engineer on the planes.

JP: Again, just one flight?

FM: Yeah.

JP: That was it?

FM: Yeah, well then I got into the 19th Transport Squadron, we had nothing but the old C-33, which was the DC-3 for passengers and the C-47, which was actually a DC-2, and that was for cargo, see. That was the old—the old workhorse. You still see 'em flying today. Yeah.

JP: So that's what—you fell into that and you stayed with that for how long?

FM: Well, until the war broke out.

JP: Until December 7.

FM: Yeah, and beyond, and beyond of course.

JP: Well, let's just, let's go right there then. Describe for me the Hickam Field the night before December 7. What were you doing? What were your colleagues doing?

FM: The night before, I don't really remember. But the morning of the seventh, I was sitting on the barracks steps in my bathing suit and I saw a plane go over Pearl.

JP: Now, were you on liberty at that time?

FM: Yeah, we were going to the beach. We were going—someone was going to pick me up and we were going to go to the beach. And I saw this one plane come over and drop something. I thought it was the navy of course. Everybody did. It was so high up, I didn't make out what it was. And for some reason, I kept my eyes on him and he turned. And he came around—Hickam is right next to Pearl.

JP: Yeah, let's talk about...

FM: Side by side.

JP: Let's talk about Hickam right now, before we get into that. Describe to me what was on the airfield. You had planes exposed?

FM: We had 'em lined up wingtip to wingtip, because of security. The commanding general figured that sabotage was our biggest worry.

JP: What, had they told you that?

FM: They didn't tell us.

JP: So you didn't know that at the time...

FM: No, no, no.

JP: ...you just had the planes out there because...

FM: Yeah, wingtip to wingtip. Perfect.

JP: Did you help in the setting up? Did you help doing that?

FM: No. No, I did not.

JP: Whose responsibility was that?

FM: The commanding general of the area.

JP: And so you dragged those planes, you helped drag those planes out and line them up on the field?

FM: [No!]

JP: Okay, so they're all exposed, essentially?

FM: Oh sure.

JP: Okay, so all right. So continue. So that morning.

FM: Perfect targets for the sort of thing that happened. Well, (coughs) excuse me. With my sighting of that first plane, and I kept my eyes on him, and he come into a shallow dive and came right down the hangar line at Hickam. He was over Pearl and he came down around and he started strafing.

JP: Now, what was going on at this time as far as Pearl? Had there been any bombing? Had you heard any bombings?

FM: I heard a loud noise and I don't remember seeing any black smoke or anything, but I heard an explosion of some kind.

JP: This was before you spotted the plane, or at the same time?

FM: Right after I spotted him. Right after I...

JP: After, right after.

FM: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. And then my squadron, the Nineteenth Transport Squadron, had a—our commanding officer was Hank Sebastian, who was all-American for Army back in the thirties. Remember him? You remember the name?

JP: I don't.

FM: Okay. But he was absent for whatever reason. And we were forced to take the orders of a young reserve Lieutenant, a local Hawaiian person. And this man—my squadron was 120 strong, which was average, normal—he fell us out on the parade ground.

JP: Remember his name by any chance?

FM: No.

JP: Okay.

FM: No. And we were perfect targets for the strafing Japs.

JP: Wait a minute here...

FM: He fell us out on the parade ground. We lived right next to it, right across the street.

JP: Yeah.

FM: To issue us small arms and ammunition. Forty-fives.

JP: So at this time, you had already realized what was going on.

FM: Oh yeah. It'd been going on for a few minutes now.

JP: Okay, okay.

FM: Yeah.

JP: All right.

FM: Yeah. And with that, we got twelve of our people killed and eleven wounded, at that moment. I felt the shrapnel and whatever all around me and I never got touched.

JP: Any of your friends?

FM: Oh yeah. Yeah. All twelve of 'em.

JP: Tell me about that. What did you feel? What was going through your head at that time?

FM: Well, anger and frightened. The whole bit, you know. We were defenseless. We couldn't do anything. Couldn't fight back, you know, and so forth. Quite a memory.

JP: Tell me about, describe to me the noise. What was it like?

FM: The noise coming from Pearl was horrendous. And equally so was the bombing of our hangars, because just about every hangar on Hickam Field was destroyed. The bombs just tore 'em apart. It was—I don't know how to describe it, really. It was just horrendous.

JP: Nothing would ever equal that sort of noise?

FM: No. I've seen volcanoes blow up, but this was worse. This was the combination of many noises, of course.

JP: So now you're in the midst of a battle?

FM: That's true.

JP: As an air corps person, had you been trained in any sort of military...

FM: Not a moment's training. (Laughs)

JP: So what, instinctively, did you know what to do? Did you know, who would you look for to help you?

FM: Well, I guess we all took our own positions at the moment and I felt that since they bombed the hangar line and there was a flight—this is the second wave now. The first wave just destroyed us. The second wave was up quite high and I, in my own mind, I figured, get to the hangar line. They're not going to bomb it again. So I headed that way and one of my friends was running behind me. And there was an explosion. I felt the concussion. I didn't feel any—I wasn't hit at all, but I turned around and the guy that was behind me, a friend of mine, his back was completely blown out; he was dead. Just like that. Yeah.

JP: What—what do you do when you see something like that? As a young man, you're watching this happen.

FM: Yeah.

JP: What did you do?

FM: I don't remember what I did, but I know I—I guess I probably cried a bit for him, you know. He was a real good friend. Yeah.

JP: So you went over to the hangar, the burning hangars. Hickam, at that time, did they have water capability, extinguishers, anything like that?

FM: Not adequate. Not—this all happened so fast, just about all the hangars were hit about the same time. You know, within a reasonable length of time, they were all blown up. Just smashed, you know.

JP: Well, describe for me the rest of the morning.

FM: Well, rumors started to fly of course, that we were going to be invaded. We better get ready. So we got these forty-fives that they issued to us under fire and all. I remember we were told to cross the runways, get on the other side of the revetments, where they used to park the airplanes, and dig foxholes.

JP: So what was the chain of command at this time? Who were you taking orders from?

FM: The reserve Second Lieutenant.

JP: He was still there?

FM: Yeah. (Chuckles) This was all—and the poor guy didn't know what he was doing, of course, you know, whatever. And I dug down. We all did. This was late in the afternoon, I believe. And we hit water because the channel had been dredged up to make the runways in Hickam Field. All that came, was coral and so forth, you know, out of the ocean. Dug down, it was water. So what we had to do was just take our shoes and socks and pants off and try to hide in there, you know, the best we could. And we spent the night that way, the whole night.

JP: Wet?

FM: Oh, soaking wet. Yeah.

JP: You spent the night...

FM: Yeah.

JP: What did you guys talk about?

FM: Oh, I don't know. It was weird. Hawaii has lots of mongoose. They were brought over to kill something, whatever.

JP: Okay.

FM: And they were rustling through the grass or whatever was there. And we had this one young fellow that had a thirty-caliber machine gun. I don't know where he got it from. But he fired. He darned near killed a bunch of us.

JP: Fired?

FM: Yeah, he was shooting at the mongoose.

JP: That seems rather peculiar though, I mean at this time where there's still quite a bit of friendly fire.

FM: Yeah.

JP: All right, there had been American planes that had been coming over that night that were fired upon and this guy's firing a thirty-millimeter...

FM: Thirty caliber machine gun.

JP: ...thirty caliber machine gun on some mongoose.

FM: Yeah, he didn't know what he was doing. I guess he was out of his gourd.

JP: Reprimand him for doing that?

FM: Yeah, I don't think he was ever severely reprimanded though. Whatever.

JP: Hmm. Now, tell me—we're going to stop there for a few seconds. And we're going to...

END OF TAPE #40

TAPE #41

JP: Okay, I'm back here with Francis Mack, who had served at Hickam Field on December 7, 1941. And Frank, you had brought me through that day, that morning, that afternoon, and we're now about late afternoon, early evening. Describe for me the condition of Hickam Field around, at about five or six o'clock, or perhaps later that night.

FM: Well, the hangars had been hit severely. Total, almost totally damaged. There was some aircraft inside of 'em that were totally lost, you know. Of course, all the parking aprons were full of wrecked aircraft that were just either burned or just strafed, you know, and blown apart. I didn't get out to

see any of the field that day. We spent that night supposedly backing up the guns of Fort Kamehameha with our forty-fives. Here's an invasion coming—and this was prevalent all through the night—they dropped flares. I don't know who was up there dropping them, but I remember the flares and so forth. And rumors were flying that we were going to be invaded. And here we were, sitting out there in the water with our forty-fives.

JP: Had you been told that by the Lieutenant, by the Second Lieutenant?

FM: No, no.

JP: So these are just rumors that you and your colleagues...

FM: We were hearing, we were hearing.

JP: ...amongst yourselves.

FM: We were hearing these things, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

JP: What was your, at that point, how much access to information did you have about what had happened at Pearl that day?

FM: Not a whole lot. Not a whole lot at all. All we knew that the damage was severe. And I believe I heard that explosion that blew up the *Arizona*, but there was so many explosions, god, how do you define it, you know, whatever.

JP: Yeah, so the field, tell me—well, let's continue with the condition of the field. Had any aircraft gotten off the ground?

FM: Well, the [B]-17's that were coming in from the States...

JP: B-17's?

FM: These are B-17's.

JP: Coming in from...

FM: General [*Truman H.*] Landon—he was a Major at the time—was leading the flight in. I remember seeing one land and there was, I don't know what kind of a plane, Jap plane it was, but he was following him right down the runway, strafing him as he landed.

JP: So this is earlier though?

FM: Yeah.

JP: This is much earlier in the day?

FM: This is during the attack. This is attack during the attack now. I remember that.

JP: Yeah, this isn't at night now.

FM: No, no. No, no. Yeah. And I remember one of 'em landing with one wheel down, the other landing gear was stuck up, and of course he spun out once his wingtip hit the ground. He just...

JP: Now, you had seen this?

FM: Yeah, I saw this.

JP: Okay, so you were on the field at this time?

FM: Sure, sure.

JP: Yeah.

FM: Yeah.

JP: How about that night now. It's getting dark.

FM: Uh-huh. They were dropping—somebody was dropping flares. I don't know who they were. They were dropping flares and they lit up the place quite a bit. And so forth. Mongoose were scattering around through and I told you about this fellow firing at them.

JP: Had you had any food to eat that day?

FM: I don't remember eating at all. I don't remember eating at all, really. Yeah.

JP: So that night now, what happened that night?

FM: Nothing really developed. We were expecting an invasion and it never happened. You know. And beyond that, I don't remember a whole lot, really.

JP: What about those—of course that evening, there had been some friendly fire on some American aircraft.

FM: Yeah, I understand some planes were coming in from one of the carriers.

JP: Now when did you, how long did you stay out on the field? Did you come back inside? Did you find shelter that night?

FM: No, we stayed out all night.

JP: You were in that foxhole.

FM: Yes, all night. Right. Right through the night, yeah. The next morning was, well, just total devastation everywhere you looked, you know.

JP: Where did you go the next morning? Did you stay at Hickam or did you...

FM: Oh yeah. Yeah, we stayed there—I've forgotten when we moved. We moved over to John Rogers from Hickam—my squadron did.

JP: John Rogers?

FM: Yeah, John Rogers, which is now John Rogers Airport.

JP: Okay.

FM: Yeah, that's the big thing there now I understand. And it was just a little area at the time.

JP: Mm-hm.

FM: I don't remember so much about that second day, really. It was (chuckles) I guess we were still in shock. Yeah.

JP: Well tell me, tell me a little bit about your military career—how many years you stayed in the military beyond Pearl Harbor and what did you inevitably become in the Air Corps?

FM: Well, I stayed in for twenty-three and a half years. I retired as a Chief Master Sergeant. I hold a Warrant as a W-[3] in the reserve.

JP: I'm sorry Frank, before we continue. I just want to talk about one more thing. When did you notify your wife what had happened?

FM: Right after the attack, my wife was notified by the War Department that I was dead. Yeah.

JP: In writing or over the phone, or in person? How was she notified?

FM: I think it was a phone call. And then I had written right after, as soon as I could. I've forgotten how many days it was I wrote and so forth and she got it straightened out. But my hometown, why, they had a reaction to it that I was already killed, you know, and so forth.

JP: Was there anything written up in the local newspapers about your supposed death?

FM: I believe there was, but I don't have a copy of it or anything any more. I believe there was. Yeah.

JP: So how long after did your wife found out that you were alive?

FM: Within thirty days. Within thirty days, yeah.

JP: So she was carrying around this information that her husband had been killed at Pearl Harbor...

FM: Right, right.

JP: ...for how long?

FM: Probably thirty days, almost.

JP: Before she...

FM: Knew that I was okay. Yeah. It was total confusion, you know. I don't know how I even got on the death list. I wasn't even touched. I wasn't hurt at all.

JP: Who was doing the mustering then?

FM: God, I don't know. I don't know.

JP: So you spent twenty-three years in the service and retired?

FM: Yeah.

JP: And you made the rank of...

FM: Chief Master [*Sergeant*].

JP: When you retired.

FM: Yeah.

JP: Twenty-three years.

FM: Yeah.

JP: Very good. I think we'll end the interview there, Frank.

FM: Okay.

JP: Running out of time and I want to thank you very much...

FM: Okay.

JP: ...for spending some time with us today.

FM: Fine.

END OF INTERVIEW