

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
#299**

**GEORGE WILLIAM BLAKE
FORT KAMEHAMEHA, SURVIVOR**

**INTERVIEWED ON
DECEMBER 8, 1998
BY DANIEL MARTINEZ**

TRANSCRIBED BY:

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**USS *ARIZONA* MEMORIAL
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

Daniel Martinez (DM): The following oral history interview was conducted by Daniel Martinez, historian for the National Park Service at the USS *Arizona* Memorial. The taping was done at the Imperial Palace Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada on December 8, 1998 at approximately eight a.m. in the morning. The person being interviewed is George W. Blake who was at Fort Kamehameha on December 7, 1941. For the record, George, would you please state your full name?

George William Blake (GB): George William Blake.

DM: And your place of birth and date of birth.

GB: New York City, New York, 29th of January 1921.

DM: And would you consider New York your hometown in 1941?

GB: I suppose I left my parents' home at that time and gone into the army.

DM: Okay. Talking about your family, how many kids were in the family?

GB: Then, I was the only child.

DM: You were the only one.

GB: Yeah.

DM: And your mom and dad were together when you grew up?

GB: Oh yes.

DM: What kind of person and what did your dad do? What was he like?

GB: Oh, my parents were from England so some of their standards were different than the typical Brooklynites.

DM: Is that right?

GB: And my father was a bricklayer. Had been all his life.

DM: Okay. Lots of that kind of work in New York, right?

GB: Yeah. Of course that was in the depression years and...

DM: How did the depression affect your family?

GB: I think there was always concern about whether there would be a steady income. My father traveled fair distances within New York environs to get to work.

DM: And your mother, she was a homemaker or did...

GB: Homemaker, yeah.

DM: So she took care of you.

GB: Sure.

DM: What kind of person was your mom?

GB: A fine person.

DM: Yeah.

GB: And...

DM: You got along really well with her?

GB: Yeah. We have a very good family relationship. My parents are quite a bit older. They didn't get married until they were thirty-nine. That's why I'm an only child, I think.

DM: Okay.

GB: And of course I was anxious, like all kids, trying to do things that they didn't approve, but it worked out.

DM: Where did you go to elementary school?

GB: Public School 119, which was about four blocks from our home.

DM: Okay. Was that in Brooklyn?

GB: Yeah, in Brooklyn, New York.

DM: And you went to high school in the same area?

GB: No. In New York City, when you graduate from grade school, you have your choice of any high school in the city. If you're taking a general course, usually you go to the one closest. But there's a lot of specialty schools in Brooklyn, in New York. I went to Manhattan actually.

DM: And where'd you go and what was the school?

GB: Well, it was called Textile High School because you know New York has a big garment district and...

DM: Right.

GB: ...and they catered in some courses to the garment industry.

DM: Okay. So it's kind of a prep school in a way for different trades?

GB: Yeah. It wasn't truly a vocational or a trade school. It was a full high school.

DM: Uh-huh.

GB: New York has this regents board system. We took the state regents exams, as you do in any of the high schools in New York, if you want a regents diploma.

DM: Right. And then going to that school, did you have a favorite subject you liked when you were in school?

GB: Not really. English was one that I did well in, I think.

DM: Yeah. How about sports? Did you play sports?

GB: Sports in New York in the schools at that time was nothing like it is today in high schools. And not only that, I always had a job after school and you don't go out with your friends because you come out and you get on a subway or a trolley car and go to your neighborhood and they go to their neighborhood. So it's a little different situation.

DM: It's like a commuter school almost.

GB: Yeah.

DM: What'd you have for your after school job?

GB: Job?

DM: Yeah.

GB: Oh, originally I worked for a little local tailor and dry cleaners, delivering the clothes...

DM: Mm-hm.

GB: ...by walking. And then later I got a job in a hotel in New York as a locker boy. They had squash and badminton courts.

DM: Mm-hm. And living in New York, you must've—what was your favorite baseball team?

GB: Oh, Brooklyn Dodgers at that time.

DM: So did you go to Ebbetts Field from time to time?

GB: Occasionally. I've never been a big sports buff.

DM: You get out of high school, you have your life ahead of you. What did you choose to do at that time?

GB: Well, I was very impulsive I think as a youngster and I just met a friend one day that had joined the army and thought that sounded pretty neat so I joined the army.

DM: How did your family react to that?

GB: Well, I asked my father what he thought of it and his answer was, “Not much.” (Laughs)

And but we could see what was happening in the war in the world. Europe was already at war. I somehow intuitively had a feeling the action was going to be in the Pacific and I rationalized with my dad that I needed to get in early and get trained and chose to go to the Pacific.

DM: Had he done any military service in England?

GB: No. His family—he came from a very large family and about half of them had been in the British Army or Navy, but my father never had.

DM: Probably in World War I, huh?

GB: Yeah, or career even, some of them.

DM: Yeah. And how'd your mother react to this?

GB: I really don't remember much of a reaction from my mother, except that I was leaving.

DM: And so you enlisted in New York.

GB: Yeah.

DM: Where'd they send you from there?

GB: Well, the recruiting office in New York, I can still know the address. It was 39 Whitehall Street. And I went through there and went up to Fort Slocum, which was a receiving replacement depot, Fort Slocum, New York. And then as that got filled up, we just processed up there. We didn't do basic training as they do now.

DM: Uh-huh.

GB: And we went on down to Ford Wadsworth on Staten Island, just because there was room there.

DM: Right.

GB: By boat. And then they took us across the bay to the Brooklyn Army base. And from there on to the [U.S.] Army transport, *Leonard Wood*, and down around through the canal and...

DM: Oh so you made that trip.

GB: Oh yeah, in those days they didn't fly you. We were twenty-eight days to Hawaii from Brooklyn.

DM: Oh, I thought they might have taken you by rail across the country.

GB: No, we actually went up to San Francisco and we got off again for four or five days. That was their system. I don't know why.

DM: Well, that must have been quite an adventure for a young man.

GB: Oh, it was great.

DM: How old were you when you went in the military?

GB: Nineteen.

DM: So you were really seeing the world.

GB: Well, I think that was the exciting part of it.

DM: When you went through Panama, did you have an opportunity to stop and...

GB: Yeah, we stopped on both sides. On one side, we didn't have any time off or weren't allowed ashore. There was some measles on board and they were worried about that.

DM: Okay.

GB: When we got to the West Coast, why, we did get a day ashore.

DM: 'Cause Panama pretty wild place in those days.

GB: It sure was.

DM: (Chuckles) Oh, you had an opportunity to see some of the...

GB: A little bit, yeah.

DM: A little bit. Get up to San Francisco, beautiful city.

GB: Right.

DM: And you had some time to spend there.

GB: Yeah, we spent five days. We went out to Angel Island...

DM: Uh-huh.

GB: ...which was Fort McDowell.

DM: Right.

GB: And then you had to take the shuttle boat across into San Francisco.

DM: And then you get on back on the [*USS*] *Henderson*?

GB: [*USAT*] *Leonard Wood*.

DM: [USAT] *Leonard Wood*, excuse me.

GB: Yeah. Yeah, after about five days, we were put back on and traveled to Honolulu.

DM: Ever get seasick on the trip?

GB: I didn't. Some people did.

DM: Yeah. So you arrive in Hawaii. Now, this is pretty exotic.

GB: Yeah.

DM: And what was your first reminiscence or impression of Hawaii when you guys, when you arrived?

GB: Well, it was beautiful. We docked down by the Aloha Tower and we were still wearing OD's or winter uniforms. And of course we were hot and uncomfortable.

DM: Right.

GB: And they loaded us into trucks and went out to Fort Kam[*ehameha*]. And we drove through the center of the post and it was a beautiful place. And we went down to our tent city down at the far end for basic training.

DM: Mm-hmm. Now, you had an opportunity then to see a little more of Hawaii. Did you get a glimpse of Pearl Harbor at all?

GB: Well, of course, Kam[*ehameha*] is right on the entrance to Pearl, so you see that part of it, but that's about all we saw on that trip.

DM: How about Hickam Field?

GB: Hickam Field, matter of fact you went right through the Hickam Field to get to Fort Kam[*ehameha*]. And...

DM: Through their main gate, right?

GB: Main gate. And at that time, the main gate at Pearl was right adjacent.

DM: Right.

GB: And then later they removed that gate and there was a navy YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] or something right there, I remember.

DM: So you go to Fort Kam[*ehameha*], you get into Tent City and is that where some more training starts for you?

GB: That's where what would today be called basic training.

DM: So it would be like boot.

GB: Like coast artillery did their own, yes.

DM: Okay.

GB: And what they did is each outfit, you were already assigned to a battery during that process.

DM: Right.

GB: And each battery provided a couple of non-com[*missioned officer*]s to monitor the basic training. They didn't have professional drill instructors like they do today.

DM: And what battery were you assigned?

GB: I was in "A" Battery of the 41st Coast Artillery.

DM: And Coast Artillery, what was their mission?

GB: Well, Coast Artillery, are primarily a defensive unit. In our case, those at Fort Kam[*ehameha*] were the designated HDPH, which is Harbor Defense of Pearl Harbor.

DM: Okay.

GB: That was our mission.

DM: So anything that came up over the horizon there...

GB: Right.

DM: ...you were to deter that threat.

GB: Sure.

DM: I know it's sometimes hard for people to get the big picture, but I got a feeling that you, after these years, understand what the overall mission was. There was a series of forts and batteries established along the southwest

coast of Oahu. How was this all interconnected? What was this—how did this all work?

GB: Well, I realize now all of the coast artillery units were under, they were designated as the Hawaiian separate coast artillery brigade.

DM: Uh-huh.

GB: And we had a brigadier general in charge of all the coast artillery defense units, which meant we were separate from the main ground troops up at Schofield Barracks, as far as command. Well, it was under the same commander, we were separated for organizational purposes. And there was all kinds of inter-connecting communication systems and things for the defensive purposes.

DM: It's my understanding that one of the observation points, one of the largest observation areas was Diamond Head.

GB: Probably true. In those days, before radar, why, all your tracking of targets would be optically and they had on tops of different mountains, there were the observation post for artillery lane.

DM: And through those observation posts were communications to the batteries?

GB: Ground lines at that time. The telephone effectively were privately owned, militarily owned phone lines.

DM: And what I found interesting and if you can confirm or change this, is that the batteries, once they selected a target, they could actually triangulate the target.

GB: Right.

DM: And quite accurately throw fire towards that target at some great distance.

What was the distance that some of those batteries could reach out?

GB: Well, of course, it depends on the size of the guns and it's been so long, I'm not going to be too accurate. But I know the maximum range was running around thirty miles, I believe.

DM: Yeah, you could reach out quite—and there was an array of type of guns and I know, I'd like to know what kind of gun you were eventually assigned to, but if you can recount, what other types of guns were made a part of the coastal battery system?

GB: Well, at that time the coastal batteries ran anywhere from the smallest I know, which were mobile, was the 155, 155 millimeter, which could be tracked around the island. And then they ranged—there were eight-inch batteries. There were twelves and sixteens, and that's about what I can remember.

DM: And some of those guns were disappearing guns then.

GB: Yeah. Well, then the bigger guns like the sixteen, there was two types. There was the disappearing gun and there was what they call a barbette

mount. And the barbette mount, the breach end of it goes down below the ground surface when it elevates. And both types we used, depending on what was installed.

DM: Now out where I live, there's Battery Barrette, I think, or Fort Barrette.

GB: Fort Barrette.

DM: Fort Barrette. And there's a battery that's a part of that. And that system is really interesting, 'cause it's still there, and it's casemated. And my understanding is casemated guns came after the Pearl Harbor attack. That all they were open pit guns prior to that.

GB: About right.

DM: Okay. Working with the gun batteries and such and you get this training, what type of gun battery were you assigned to?

GB: We had eight-inch railway rifles.

DM: Now, what's a railway rifle?

GB: Well, the gun is mounted on a railway flatcar, depressed center, flatcar. And eight inches of diameter on the bore and the word rifle means that it has rifling in the barrel rather than a mortar.

DM: So when a gun is rifled, it has these grooves that are...

GB: Spiral-shaped, yes.

DM: And what, how does that help a shell going out?

GB: By giving it a rotational motion when it leaves, it supposedly travels better and it's more accurate.

DM: Now, the idea of a mobile gun meant that you had the capability of going other places.

GB: True.

DM: Can you explain how the railway gun system worked on Oahu?

GB: Well, when we were set up, the guns were actually jacked up off the track and supports put underneath and outriggers stabilizing, so they could fire crossways, if you're sitting on rails. And if you know anything about Oahu Rail and Land Company, they were a narrow gauge system.

DM: Right.

GB: Our guns were made for standard gauge, so they're very heavy. I think they weighed in mobile position about fifty or sixty ton and the small engines on Oahu had to struggle to move them. But we would move to a position and with built-in jacks, they would jack the unit up, put cross ties under the depressed center part, lowered back down to carry the weight off the rails, and then put outriggers out on the four corners to stabilize it.

DM: How long would it take to set up a system like that?

GB: Well, a good gun crew could probably do it in probably take over an hour or two.

DM: How many men consisted of a gun crew?

GB: Well, the firing gun crew was about five men. Of course you had plenty of manpower in the army. Labor was cheap.

DM: Right.

GB: And in setting it up, there was more men than that involved.

DM: Probably close to twenty? Would that be fair?

GB: I would think you could put that many on the gun.

DM: Interesting. Were there preset battery positions? Was there rail spurs, or how did that...

GB: Yeah, there were several around the island. I personally had been to two of them and what they did is they just had spurs, one for each gun. In our case, four guns.

DM: Four guns made up your battery?

GB: Four guns to a battery.

DM: Uh-huh.

GB: And these spurs ran off the main line by a few hundred yards and faced the way they wanted to and dispersed them in spacing.

DM: Now what was your uniform like? Was your uniform a little distinctive from other army uniforms?

GB: Not really. The overseas hat had red piping on it, or scarlet, which was the coast artillery. The colors on the hats designated the branch of service.

DM: Right. So you had scarlet and that's a tradition that goes back many years...

GB: Oh yeah.

DM: ...to the Civil War, where they started designating blue for infantry, red for artillery.

GB: Right.

DM: Then there's coast artillery, yellow for cavalry. So did you have the doughboy hat, the campaign hat that you guys wore in the field or...?

GB: I've often wondered what happened to my hats. We had about seven different hats in peacetime. We had a pith helmet. We wore a garrison cap. We wore the overseas hat. We had fatigue hats, which at that time were blue. I can't think of what else. Oh, the new green fatigue hats.

DM: Four and...

GB: And the old tin hat. The World War I type.

DM: So you were issued helmets then, right.

GB: We weren't issued initially. There was an alert in Hawaii a year before Pearl Harbor that where we actually went into a war mode and were issued gas masks and tin hats and live ammunition, really, for the first time.

DM: That's interesting. This mobile radar system, this mobile railway gun system, that gave you, the army, the capability of going wherever the threat was.

GB: Anywhere the rails went.

DM: And the rails, was it extensive over Oahu?

GB: As I recall, they didn't go completely around the island, probably around three-quarters of the coastline was covered by rail.

DM: Right.

GB: And I'm sure there was a line up over the center somewhere, to go out to Haleiwa.

DM: The Tent City, were you in that all the time at [*Fort*] Kamehameha, or did they eventually move you into barracks?

GB: Oh, they moved us and that was just for boot camp type.

DM: Okay.

GB: We lived in tents for about—I can't remember. Six or eight weeks, I think.

DM: Now, these barracks, Fort Kamehameha today is certainly not what it looked like then, but in some cases it is. I mean, there's officers quarters still there. There's some of the fixed battery positions there. Was that a two-story wooden barracks?

GB: No, they were all one-story. They were built on a quadrangle basis, with a grass or garden kind of thing in the middle. Open porches all around the inside.

DM: Did you sleep in open bays or have separate...

GB: No, it was all open barracks.

DM: And bunked?

GB: Not double-deckers, no. Just cots.

DM: Okay. And so how many men were in your battery?

GB: I'd say in peacetime, probably about 125. And then they filled in more during the war.

DM: During that time, did you personally have any pictures taken? Was there a group picture taken of the battery and what do you have in your possession that kind of reflects that time? Anything?

GB: Oh sure. Every year there was a group picture taken shortly before Christmas or Thanksgiving and it was put in the menus for the holidays. And if you've seen any of those pictures, every one of them looks the same.

DM: Yeah, I've—recently we acquired one of the signal company, that was the radar company.

GB: Uh-huh.

DM: And that's a treasure. I'm asking that because it would be something nice to supplement your folder, so we might talk later about the opportunity of maybe getting some copies of that.

GB: Okay.

DM: Did you have any pictures of the railway guns at all?

GB: Yes I do.

DM: Okay.

GB: Yeah, we had a post photographer that took professional-type pictures and sold them and I think I got a couple of copies. And “B” Battery, which was not mine, they have an annual firing and they won the Knox Trophy, which was the prize thing to do for coastal artillery units for that year.

DM: Sort of like an efficiency award...

GB: Right.

DM: ...that the navy had on some of the ships.

GB: Right.

DM: That must have been very interesting out at Fort Kamehameha, because you could see these battlewagons and carriers and all kinds of ships going in and out of the harbor. It's right there.

GB: Oh sure. Down along the edge of our water, there was two places we'd go swimming and you're swimming in Pearl Harbor, really.

DM: Right. I know that area. I was just wondering, as you saw this big military build-up in Hawaii, did you have any, as a young man, have any idea that this looks pretty good or we're pretty well-prepared out here?

GB: Yeah, I think we thought we were. You have to remember, this is prior to the draft that most of my thinking is about and I guess we consider ourselves regular army or today you'd be called professional soldier.

DM: Right.

GB: And yeah, we thought we were pretty hot. (Chuckles)

DM: What was—when you got—I'm thinking, trying to think of the army term for liberty, but when you got, you know, your pass for the weekend...

GB: Yeah.

DM: ...you went down to Honolulu, I'm sure.

GB: Sure.

DM: What was that like in those days?

GB: Well, it was exciting for someone from New York. You know, the ethnic mixture in Hawaii is so different and you feel like you're in a foreign country.

DM: Right.

GB: And the place was beautiful and much lower key than it is today.

DM: Right.

GB: And there were trolley cars running around Honolulu, which for some people...

DM: The mass transit, which Honolulu could use today.

GB: Yeah.

DM: What was your favorite recreational activity when you went down to Honolulu?

GB: Well, we used to run out to Fort DeRussy a lot. We'd send busses or trucks out there for swimming on Waikiki and that sort of thing. And in the army, sports was pretty big. There was a lot of competitive things. We'd go to the Army-Navy "Y" [*Armed Forces YMCA*] and watch swimming meets and that sort of thing. And initially, of course, you like to travel around and see the island more. And without a car, you didn't get out of Honolulu very far

easily. Probably getting off the base and getting a good meal was something you enjoyed.

DM: Now, did you ever go into the Black Cat Club or was that too many swabbies there?

GB: No.

DM: And I'd like to ask you about this Army-Navy rivalry, if it existed or not.

GB: Well, I think it existed in our minds. We'd seen so many movies, you know, the John Wayne type and you built up this relationship. And I think we got along well, but there was still a little give and take between the services.

DM: Was there a favorite hangout for you in Honolulu?

GB: Well, my battery, everybody seemed to have their own place. We've been, as you mentioned, the Black Cat, I've been there. I've been to several of the bars along that area. But we had a little place called Fuji's which was about

a block behind the Army-Navy “Y.” And I’m trying to remember now—
Fuji’s was a bar that if our people went in from our battery, you were all
together there and had a good relationship with the owners. They got to
know you and treated you pretty nice.

DM: So kind of your rendezvous point.

GB: Right. And then across the street was a little place where you could get what
we called at that time meat on a stick and some *saimin* or chicken noodle
soup sort of thing. And that was our late night snack before you went back
and we’d meet our other fellows there.

DM: *Saimin* is a popular staple. It’s still in Hawaii. Soup and they have different
varieties. So that must have been a little bit of different departure culturally
for you in the kind of food, right.

GB: Oh sure. Well, you know, at that age, you’ll eat anything and we found out
we liked it so.

DM: Obviously there was the other type of recreational activities down the street and Hotel Street, River Street and everything. Of course, I know that you probably never partook in any of that but were aware of it.

GB: Oh sure. Of course, the rarees in Honolulu were off-limits to the GIs because it was in some pretty rough neighborhoods in downtown Honolulu.

DM: Oh that was?

GB: Yeah, down—I'm trying to remember—the Ala Wai Park, is that right?

DM: In the Waikiki area?

GB: Yeah, we were, that was off-limits, I think, because of the hangouts and the street people there.

DM: Uh-huh. Some rough and tumbles.

GB: Yeah.

DM: Did you ever witness or were part of a kind of a bar room brawl that were kind of popular sometimes that happened on the weekends?

GB: Not the Hollywood type, but we have seen some fights. But MPs were all over the place.

DM: Okay. I understand that the Honolulu Police Department could be pretty rough on—pretty big guys and didn't put up with any nonsense.

GB: Well, they had to. There was so many troops and so many navy people there and of course they get out drinking and get out of hand. But anywhere you went there were MPs and they worked closely with the Honolulu police.

DM: I want to take you to the events coming up towards Pearl Harbor. The army was certainly involved, under the command of General Short, with alerts that took place in late November of 1941. Can you recount to me, I mean that alert for that two weeks before Pearl Harbor, how your battery was involved and what happened to you guys?

GB: Well, we went on an alert and I think what we heard is it was basically an anti-sabotage alert. And we did a lot of guard duty, patrolling different areas. And we did have live ammunition for the railway guns in the field. And at one end of our post was an area called the gun park, which is where they left the guns when they were in Fort Kam[*ehameha*]. We did a lot of guard duty there and we were that way for a couple weeks. We didn't really know what was going on, but we knew it was serious or supposed to be.

DM: Now, if you're on an anti-sabotage alert, who were the potential saboteurs?

GB: Well, of course, in Hawaii since the local Japanese population was a big percentage of the people, there was concern about the locals.

DM: That leads me to the conclusion that as soldiers, you were fairly much aware that the potential adversary out there was Japan.

GB: Yeah, I think we did. We felt that way anyway.

DM: If I was to later send you a map of Fort Kamehameha, one of the things that's our biggest gap is since we weren't there, we don't know where these places were. Maybe the medical dispensary or the barracks or the gun park, or any of these areas. Would you be able to maybe pencil in some of these for us, based on...

GB: I think so.

DM: Would you mind doing that at a later time?

GB: Sure.

DM: Okay.

GB: Glad to. Actually, as you know, Fort Kam[*ehameha*] was a very small base.

DM: Right.

GB: Most of the coast artillery bases are and so that would be pretty easy.

DM: Okay. We're going to have two more minutes here and then we're going to switch tapes but leading up to the Pearl Harbor attack, you as a, now, I guess you were about twenty in '41?

GB: Yeah, that's true.

DM: Did you have any impression that the war clouds were gathering in the Pacific and maybe I'm going to get into something out here?

GB: I think we all believed it, yes. The war in Europe was progressing and Japan was doing things that—and we knew they were negotiating in Washington for peace or for settlements. And that was our mission, really.

DM: You were reading the newspapers and kind of getting an idea?

GB: Not regular. Yeah, mostly you got—we saw newspapers but not regular basis. At that age, I didn't study the newspapers.

DM: Was there conversations, you know in the lag times, among the soldiers you worked with that...

GB: I think there might have been some but not a great deal.

DM: A battery has a tradition of being fairly close knit. People know each other. They have to work efficiently. How would you rate your gun that you were on?

GB: Well, based on the army of the time, we thought we were pretty well-trained. Now, you know, we all felt the—the regular army always felt superior to the draftee when later we got from them because they didn't follow the traditions and the mannerisms of the service and we thought that was all-important. Because in a peacetime army, spit and polish and drilling and things is a big part of your life.

DM: Okay, we're going to stop tape.

END OF TAPE #33

TAPE #34

DM: Okay. On the weekend of, the fateful weekend of December 7, 1941, what was your life like on December 6? Did you have leave?

GB: Well, December 6, we were just coming off this alert, which we had been on for, I think, a couple of weeks.

DM: Oh, you were coming off the anti-sabotage alert?

GB: Right. And returned to barracks. Some of us had been living in the field at that time.

DM: Was your battery in the field?

GB: Well, we were still in Fort Kam[*ehameha*]. There were some that were down by the gun parks that were living down that way to, you know, so

there were people all the time. And we had to return live ammunition. We returned the magazines and that sort of thing.

DM: Was that done on Friday, or when did you stand down?

GB: I guess, I think it was Saturday or at least it was over the weekend, Friday and Saturday.

DM: And did you go out that Saturday night or did you stay in?

GB: No. I just got back to barracks and returned to a normal weekend life.

DM: Hardly turned out that way, huh?

GB: No.

DM: Let's go to Sunday, December 7. How did your day start out? I mean, were you up early in the morning? Did you go to breakfast? Did you go to church? Or what was your plan of the day and how did it go?

GB: Well, my personal movements were that we got up and had breakfast, which was an hour later than usual. On Sunday you could sleep in a little bit.
And...

DM: What time was that?

GB: Oh, probably seven o'clock instead of six o'clock.

DM: Right.

GB: And right across the street from our barracks in back of it was the post gym. And we had a championship basketball team in our battery, post champions. And they had allocation of the gym that morning. So we went over to scrimmage with them, you know, just make up games, give them practice.

DM: Uh-huh.

GB: And I was over in the gymnasium when things started.

DM: So that was around eight o'clock?

GB: Well, yeah, around 7:55 or whatever it was.

DM: Describe to me your own personal recollection of getting the impression that something's going on here that's not usual.

GB: Well, we're in the gym and I heard a noise and what it sounded like, it was so close, that it sounded like, as I described it, an airplane landing on a corrugated metal roof. And I knew it didn't have a metal roof. And I ran outside and there was a Jap plane only just barely clearing the top of the building. He was strafing as he came across.

DM: What was he strafing?

GB: Anything.

DM: Hickam or you guys?

GB: Anything. I don't know how many people were outdoors at that early in the morning. Most of us were indoors. But our barracks is right across the street, so he went directly overhead. And the noise that I heard, that I thought was on this metal roof was actually his machine gun fire.

DM: Did you...

GB: I'm sorry.

DM: Go ahead.

GB: I was just going to say, you look up and you see the red ball but you don't believe it.

DM: And you knew what the red ball stood for.

GB: Yeah, I think we knew what it was, but your mind doesn't accept it.

DM: When did your mind finally start to accept that you guys were under attack?

GB: Well, we immediately, almost instantly there was a post signal, a siren that would sound for an alert and it was a coded blast that would either indicate a fire or an alert. And the siren started up and power went out, I think. And it stopped in the middle of this wail and we didn't know what it was saying, but by this time we'd adjusted to the fact that it was an attack.

DM: Now, this wail, would it sound like a fire engine or...

GB: Yeah, it would either...

DM: ...or was it a claxon?

GB: ...it was a post siren, a big one. No, no. It was a siren and it would either go in a modulating tone or a steady tone and that would indicate whether it was a fire or an alert.

DM: And what was the tone that morning?

GB: Well, it was just started and then it quit. Yeah, I couldn't tell you what...

DM: Was that a modulating tone?

GB: I really don't recall.

DM: Okay.

GB: I just knew it quit before it finished its signal.

DM: Now, would you respond to buglers at all, or...

GB: Sure. I don't remember a bugle going that morning. The system at the base there was a bugle that stood outside the guardhouse, which was, oh, about three or four barracks down from where we were. And you could hear it if you were quiet and out on the street.

DM: But things weren't quiet now, were they?

GB: No. There was a lot of activity. Everyone was looking out to see what was happening or running for someplace. And if it was an alert, our normal procedure was to get into a field packs and clothing and be full-out ready to go somewhere.

DM: Is that what you guys did?

GB: Well, we ran into the barracks. I did personally. Most of them did and started to assemble our gear and a sergeant did come through the barracks and said, "Stay undercover."

And so for a few moments, we just stayed there and the strafing continued.

DM: Was anybody injured during the strafing that you know of?

GB: There was none in "A" battery. The only ones that I know personally, there was a new battery being formed in the 41st Coast Artillery, which was "C"

Battery. And they had, they were down on the street, had one of the new two-story barracks. There was one on the base by that time.

DM: Uh-huh.

GB: And they were setting a machine gun up on the roof of the ordnance building and a Jap plane crashed into them. And it killed all four of the fellows that were up there.

DM: So that was during the raid?

GB: Yes.

DM: Now, that, there is a very famous picture of that plane—it was a fighter—apparently hit the building and then twisted and careened...

GB: Right.

DM: ...and ended up against the ordnance building...

GB: Right.

DM: ...I think or something. And four men were killed there.

GB: Yes.

DM: Okay. That's interesting, because I had no idea that, other than the pilot being a casualty, that there were other, there was American casualties there.

GB: Yeah, there were four and they were from—the record wouldn't show a "C" Battery because it was just being formed and they were part of the cadre to assemble it.

DM: From your position, could you have looked toward Wheeler, or rather excuse me, Hickam Field and see what was going on?

GB: Couldn't see Hickam too well, but as I came out of the gym, smoke was already coming up at Pearl, which we could see. And I thought, we thought it was from the tank farm. It was black smoke.

DM: Right. So you thought they may have hit the storage...

GB: That was our guess, yeah.

DM: Many, many eyewitnesses, survivors recount that they had never seen that amount of planes in the air. Did you get a chance to look up and see these planes and did you see 'em flying in for their attacks or...

GB: Not really. We're very conscious of the ones that were over Fort Kam[*ehameha*] and I think what was probably happening, when they came down and hit Hickam, they continued strafing as they came across and would catch Kam[*ehameha*] on the same pass. Now, I'm not sure that's true or not.

DM: Well, it is true. They were trying to suppress anybody...

GB: Right.

DM: ...I talked to a Japanese pilot and he said, "Our job was to make sure that they didn't get to their defenses. Because their getting to the defenses would insure probably us getting shot down."

GB: Right.

DM: So they were pretty much trying to suppress things. I'd like to just go back and ask you a question. There was an incident that took place right off Fort Kamehameha, with the destroyer *Ward* opening fire on a submarine. Did you hear any of that or see any of that?

GB: No. And it always surprised me that the navy, that was prior to the war being declared and the navy sunk...

DM: Six-thirty in the morning.

GB: ...and they sunk a submarine, if I recall.

DM: Right.

GB: And I'm trying to picture the army operation. I can't picture that I would shoot at anybody in peacetime without permission, but the navy apparently was authorized to do that.

DM: And what's curious to me is that obviously Fort Kamehameha is right in that proximity and I've yet to run across any account of them witnessing it or wondering what the hell the navy was doing.

GB: Yeah. Well, you know, gunfire around a base is not unusual, I guess. And of course, Sunday morning, a lot of people weren't up yet and I don't know how close it actually was. I know it was off that area.

DM: Well, you bring up a very good point. And that point is and something that people, visitors to the memorial say, "Well, why didn't they react to that?"

I think that one of the things that I've gotten from the survivors is that, you know, mock attacks and gunfire was not an unusual occurrence in 1941.

GB: That's right. Well, our first reaction to the attack was that it was some kind of a surprise drill. And that was one of the things that went through your mind.

DM: That the army was up to something.

GB: Right.

DM: Or the navy was up to something. So but that disbelief, that belief of a mock raid ended quickly.

GB: Mm-hm.

DM: So now that you're in the barracks, sergeants come through. What happens next?

GB: Well, I got sent with a little detail. We had a minimum amount of ammunition in the supply room. And I went off with a group in a truck to go to the magazine and get small arms ammunition.

DM: Was there any supply sergeant or ordnance man there that was not authorizing ammunition...

GB: I have heard, I've read that in many cases, but I didn't notice it in our barracks.

DM: So you got your ammunition. You guys were equipped with 03 Springfields.

GB: Right.

DM: And sidearms for the non-coms.

GB: Right.

DM: And off you went. So then you got into field gear, I suspect, right.

GB: Right.

DM: What happened next to you?

GB: Well, by the time we come back getting the ammunition, most of the battery had moved out and I'm a little backwards on some of the time. I mean, in the sequence of things. But the first sergeant and a clerk or somebody else was still at the barracks and he said to us to—there were about three of us—he said, "Make your way down to the gun park, but stay under cover."

And most of the fellows had already gone there. And we went outside and about that time something else came along and I got under a tree and fired my rifle at 'em, which didn't do much good, but I felt better.

DM: So you were firing at Japanese planes...

GB: With a Springfield, yeah.

DM: (Chuckles)

GB: Which, at the height they were flying, I suppose it was possible to do some damage, but you're kind of excited.

DM: Right. Doing something, right. Fighting back.

GB: Sure.

DM: Were you angry that morning?

GB: No. I mean, I don't think I sensed anger at the time.

DM: Were you scared at all?

GB: Of course. But, I don't know. You know, as I mentioned before, I've said, we've seen too many John Wayne movies. American soldiers invincible and you're a professional soldier and you're a kid.

DM: Right. Was that the first day that you ever saw somebody killed? Dead bodies?

GB: Yes.

DM: How did that strike you?

GB: I'm not sure I did a lot of thinking at the time. I know with the Jap plane at the ordnance building, they had already posted a guard there to prevent anyone from taking souvenirs or climbing in the wreckage or looking at anything. And we were pretty busy. I was told to work my way to the gun park and stay under cover, which was mostly palm trees. And we did that and they were already setting up defenses down there.

DM: But you did see that plane?

GB: Oh yes.

DM: What's curious about—I don't know if you know about this, but I'll ask you. Maybe you do. The plane's there. It's all busted up and a lot of people standing around and pictures being taken, but the pilot is not in it. Did you see what happened to the pilot's body?

GB: No, I didn't.

DM: Probably taken away by that time. In these photos you can see it. You look inside the cockpit, but I've always been curious, what happened to the pilot?

GB: Huh! No, I wasn't aware of that. When I worked my way past that plane, I saw it there. There was a guard there to prevent anyone from, as I say, taking souvenirs or disturbing anything the intelligence people wanted to get involved. And I wasn't even aware at that time how many were killed there by that plane.

DM: Found that out later?

GB: Yeah.

DM: You go down to the gun battery eventually, I guess. And do you guys move out eventually from there?

GB: We couldn't. The railway tracks ran through Hickam Field and they'd been destroyed.

DM: So you...

GB: We couldn't leave. Pardon?

DM: You'd been neutralized.

GB: In effect, from moving. And of course, our whole mission being seacoast, we expected landings and that's what we were prepping for. And with this load of ammunition I had gotten, we went down and were distributing small arms ammunition, loading machine gun belts. They weren't pre-loaded at that time, for fifty calibers. And setting up machine gun perimeters around the railway rifles.

DM: Was it the feeling that what was coming next was an invasion?

GB: I think we assumed that. Yeah, we believed it.

DM: So Fort Kamehameha bristled at this time. Everybody had a job to do and they were doing it.

GB: Right.

DM: After the raid is over, what happens that afternoon? You guys are just continuing to get ready for...

GB: Yeah. Matter of fact, I was assigned—I wasn't normally on a machine gun, but I was assigned to a thirty caliber machine gun and we set up two of them right along the channel, right on the edge of the gun park and Pearl Harbor channel.

DM: So when was that done?

GB: Well, the time element fools you because...

DM: That day?

GB: ...everything happened in two hours, but it seemed like a lot longer.

DM: Did it happen that day?

GB: Oh yes. Yeah.

DM: So you may have witnessed some of the ships streaming out of the harbor?

GB: Saw the ships going out. I saw another crashed plane just off our—it was an American plane, an O-47, if I recall. Somebody said it was an O-47, which is an observation plane.

DM: Right.

GB: That was out on the water just a few yards off the beach. We dug in, preparatory for a landing.

DM: I talked to some of the soldier that were at Fort Weaver, and they said as some of the ships passed by, they were cheering those guys on to go, I guess, kick the living daylights out of the Japanese.

GB: Yeah, I can believe that.

DM: Did that happen on your side? Did you guys say anything to the...

GB: They weren't that close to the shore at that point because the land bends away from the channel as it goes out, the open mouth of Pearl Harbor.

DM: Right.

GB: We did experience that the next day, when we got our railway guns out. We went through the navy housing area...

DM: Uh-huh.

GB: (Pause) I'm sorry.

DM: That's okay. (Pause) What happened in that navy housing area?

GB: Nothing special. I find my emotions are more affected today than they were fifty years ago.

DM: Well sometimes I think that's in the recounting of the story. You're talking about things you haven't talked about for a while, but it's all right.

GB: Well on December 8 they had, (clears throat) excuse me, repaired the rails through Hickam and we moved out. We had a very impressive looking train. There were four eight-inch railway guns and several boxcars with troops and ammunition and we pulled out onto the main line and it was somewhere around navy housing, near Pearl and there were a lot of civilians, probably wives, families of navy. And we were moving out to the other shore. We had to stop there for a few minutes because the engine had to be

moved to the other end of the train to go in the other direction and there was a lot of cheering by the people then.

DM: And it's that cheering that gets to you.

GB: I don't know why. I go out to Pearl Harbor to the memorial and I go through this.

DM: Well, a lot of survivors do. I think it has to do with that—I don't know. I know, I can't tell you what I think. You may have to tell me, but sometimes it's this defining moment of your life. It's the casualties, all those young guys that had futures.

GB: Well, you know I didn't see a lot of the horrors of war that other people did and I had a very good duty, even through the war, being a defensive unit. I think I was very lucky. But if I go to the Punchbowl, I'm the same way.

DM: Yeah. Well does it have to do with that sacrifice that these guys made?

GB: And their age.

DM: 'Cause you all were young men then?

GB: Yes.

DM: Did you have an opportunity, as your guns moved out through there, to see any of the damage at Pearl Harbor?

GB: I don't remember that we actually could see anything. We were very conscious of defending this train against locals again.

DM: Right.

GB: We were concerned about sabotage.

DM: So sabotage was a factor, as you moved out, that there was going to be some kind of—maybe a fifth column is working?

GB: I think there was a common belief with the military. Yes.

DM: Yeah. Did you stay in Hawaii for some time after that?

GB: Yes. Since we were defensive units, as I mentioned before, we were separate coastal artillery brigade, and that was the reason for that. We stayed there as part of the defense of the island while the infantry and people had to go down and take other islands in the Pacific.

DM: And how long were you there?

GB: I stayed 'til 1943.

DM: And then what happened to you?

GB: Well, they were starting rotation and things, and I was sent back to the States.

DM: And you did...

GB: The Mainland.

DM: ...the Mainland. And where did you go, to another fort?

GB: Well, I got sent back to infantry school at Fort Benning, Georgia, and after that, I wanted to get back to coast artillery, which was my love and I did go down to Camp Stewart, Georgia, which was mostly anti-aircraft.

DM: Right.

GB: And there was a replacement depot. And from there I was sent up to Fort Monroe. I had gotten into radar in the meantime and I went up to Fort Monroe, Virginia, which was headquarters for the coast artillery. And I was sent there to take radar school and they had to replace their instructors with overseas people and I had been overseas, so I got to stay on as an instructor.

DM: Was that where you were when the war ended?

GB: Yes.

DM: So you had done your service all the way through in coast artillery and when did you get out of the army?

GB: Well, they brought out a point system—I don't know if you're familiar with that.

DM: Yes.

GB: So I got out a couple months before Japan surrendered. I got out in July of '45.

DM: And what did V-J Day, how did that strike you when that all happened?

GB: Well, I was out and a civilian by that time and I was working and our company gave us the day off and we all celebrated. I happened to celebrate more on V-E Day because I, we had gone home on leave from Fort Monroe and I—even the trains lose luggage and my bags didn't arrive 'til the next

day and I had gone back over to New York, Manhattan. And ended up in Times Square on V-E Day and that was a very celebratory happening.

DM: Great pictures of that event.

GB: Oh. Amazing.

DM: How did your folks feel about finally seeing you come home?

GB: Oh, they were glad to see me of course.

DM: What did you dad say to you?

GB: Oh, didn't—my dad was a very quiet man, very serious. Didn't say a lot really. He had heard things about what went on at Pearl and I gather that the original news reports, the first year, didn't give the populous a very detailed report of how bad it was.

DM: Did you ever tell him?

GB: I don't think we ever discussed it.

DM: But your mother was a little apprehensive, you being at war.

GB: Oh sure. As a matter of fact, when we had moved out in the field from Fort Kam[*ehameha*], they were worried and of course didn't know what was happening and I got a cablegram or radiogram arrived a few days later with a paid answer, and no way to get the answer back to them, that I was all right.

DM: Oh my gosh.

GB: And mail was censored of course. In the beginning it was kind of a mess getting your mail in or out.

DM: And how did you eventually get that word to them?

GB: There was a truck going into Honolulu for supplies or something and I just wrote an answer. Said, "I'm all right. Don't worry," and he managed to get it to the radiogram, RCA or...

DM: Was that about a month after...

GB: I'm not sure it was that long, but it was during that two or three weeks maybe.

DM: Is there anything that you'd like to say or cover that we didn't talk about? We've talked about a lot of subjects.

GB: Not really. I think I was very fortunate, being in—when you go in the service, you don't know what branch, you don't know anything about the army really and you choose a branch on a hunch. And I was fortunate. When I enlisted, I enlisted for the Philippines and coast artillery, which meant Corrigador. And at that time, your time overseas was time and a half. You could get out in two years and I thought that was great, in case I didn't like it. And I got to Fort Slocum and they said there was a transport for the

Philippines that left. There was another one in six months and I could sit there at Fort Slocum, and that time didn't count in your two-year enlistment. Or I could change my duty station. Well, at the time I was disappointed and I changed it to Hawaii. I was very fortunate. I had one day of action instead of being a Jap prisoner for seven years.

DM: Or worse.

GB: Or worse. And then again I think I was very fortunate, my friends in Pearl Harbor, the army fellows in Pearl Harbor Survivors, several of 'em are infantry. They had to take all the islands in the Pacific all the way to Japan and I just was very fortunate.

DM: Well, I want to thank you for this interview and thank you for sharing your personal recollections.

GB: Well, my pleasure.

END OF INTERVIEW