

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

#285

GERALD “Jerry” M. WENNER

47TH PURSUIT SQUADRON, WHEELER AIRFIELD

**INTERVIEWED ON
DECEMBER 6, 1998
BY DANIEL MARTINEZ**

TRANSCRIBED BY:

CARA KIMURA

AUGUST 22, 2001

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

Daniel Martinez (DM): Okay. And you can just look right at me, we'll just talk.

Gerald Wenner (GW): Okay, I will try to.

DM: Oh that's—that'll be fine.

The following oral history interview was conducted by Daniel Martinez, historian for the National Park Service at the USS *Arizona* Memorial. The taping took place at the Imperial Palace Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada on December 6, 1998 at approximately ten minutes to one. The person being interviewed is Gerald Wenner, also known as Jerry Wenner.

GW: Right.

DM: Who was at Wheeler Field, a member of the 47th Pursuit Squadron. This squadron had been moved to Haleiwa on December 7, 1941. For the record, Jerry, would you please state your full name?

GW: My full name is Gerald M. Wenner.

DM: And place of birth?

GW: I was born in Knox, Pennsylvania, 1920, November 15.

DM: Could you tell me what you considered your hometown in 1941?

GW: Well, it was Knox, Pennsylvania.

DM: Okay. You grew up in Knox, Pennsylvania, went to elementary school there?

GW: Well, I wasn't—that was our post office address, was Knox.

DM: Okay.

GW: I lived out in the country, in Rural Route 1. I went to a little old school called Salem High School.

DM: How big was that school? How many people?

GW: Well, we had seven people in our graduating class.

DM: (Chuckles) So it's relatively small.

GW: Nineteen thirty-eight.

DM: Now, describe to me your family. How many people were in your family?

GW: Well, I had a brother and two sisters and we lived on a farm.

DM: Uh-huh.

GW: And it was tough going back in those days.

DM: I bet it was. It was during the depression, right?

GW: Yes, during the depression. And my brother got killed in Europe.

DM: During the war?

GW: In the war, Battle of the Bulge. And my two sisters are still living. They live right near Knox, Pennsylvania.

DM: Let me ask you about—were both your parents alive when you grew up?

GW: Yes.

DM: What did your dad do? He ran this farm? Did he have another job?

GW: Well, he ran the farm and worked elsewhere whenever he could find a job.

DM: To supplement the income.

GW: Yes. They were just starting to build highways back in those days. And occasionally he'd get a job on a construction job on a highway. Didn't pay very much.

DM: Right.

GW: But there wasn't anything else around. We had a refinery right close in a little town called Hamilton, Pennsylvania.

DM: Oil refinery?

GW: Yes, Quaker State.

DM: Okay.

GW: And of course, my brother-in-law worked there but the people that worked there had been there for years and years and years, and there's no chance of getting in.

DM: Right. How about your mother? Tell me a little bit about her.

GW: Well, my mother, of course, grew up on a farm. A farm family.

DM: Uh-huh.

GW: And they married—I can't even remember their anniversary date.

DM: Okay.

GW: She was strictly a housewife, took care of the—did all kind of work on the farm. We canned all our vegetables for the winter. There were no freezers. We didn't have electricity.

DM: Right.

GW: Canned all our vegetables for the winter and she did all the washing, hanging out the clothes to dry. No mechanical dryers or anything.

DM: I suspect all the kids helped with the...

GW: Oh yes.

DM: ...chores, right?

GW: Yes. We started out when we were ten or twelve years old to work on the farm.

DM: After you graduated from high school, what was next for you in your life? Did you expect you were going to be a farmer or were you looking in other directions?

GW: I was looking to find a job.

DM: Okay.

GW: But I couldn't find one, so I worked for my father on the farm for a year.

DM: Uh-huh.

GW: And some of my buddies come by one day and says, "Army Air Corps is taking on pilots. There are people training for pilots."

And I says, "Let's go down to the recruiting station," so three of us went down there.

DM: Where was the recruiting station at?

GW: Butler, Pennsylvania.

DM: Uh-huh.

GW: We went down there and they had no vacancies. Of course, we didn't have—at that time, they required two years of college for pilot training.

DM: Mm-hm.

GW: And none of us had that. So they didn't even have any vacancies in the enlisted corps of the Army Air Corps at that time.

DM: Mm-hm.

GW: But the recruiting sergeant talked me into signing up for the field artillery.

DM: Okay.

GW: So I did. And I enlisted in April, 1939. And I was sent from there, from Butler, to New York City to Fort Slocum, where we caught the old USAT *Republic*...

DM: Right.

GW: ...to go to Honolulu.

DM: Uh-huh.

GW: And it took us thirty days to get over there, down through the canal. Of course, we laid over a week in Treasure Island, in San Francisco Bay. And arrived in Honolulu June 30, 1939, and was assigned to 13th Field Artillery, Battery E.

DM: Okay. So you started out as artillery man.

GW: Yes.

DM: Okay. I'm going to stop right here for just a moment. We have a problem outside and that's...

(Taping stops, then resumes)

DM: Okay. So...are we ready? So you get in this artillery outfit and where do you go from there after you've—are they going to ship you over, or what are they going to do with you?

GW: I was assigned to the artillery at Schofield.

DM: At Schofield.

GW: Schofield and we arrived over in Honolulu on June the thirtieth and went directly to the 13th Field Artillery, Battery E.

DM: What was your job in the artillery unit?

GW: I was a battery clerk.

DM: Okay. So that's like a company...

GW: First sergeant—yes.

DM: Right.

GW: Looked at—saw I had a high school education. I couldn't type. Never took typing. So he give me one of these five-by-eight cards...

DM: Uh-huh.

GW: ...with all the exercises on the back and he says, "Sit down there and learn to type."

DM: And did you?

GW: I did.

DM: And what was life like at—you'd never been to Hawaii before, so what did you, what were your first impressions of it?

GW: Oh, the climate was great.

DM: Right.

GW: Except once in a while it rained and when it rained, it poured. And our old army slicker didn't quite shed that rain. (Chuckles)

DM: Is that right? Now Schofield Barracks, was that a fairly regimented life up there?

GW: Oh yes.

DM: Squared away soldiers up there? Spit and polish?

GW: I beg your pardon?

DM: Spit and polish?

GW: Oh yes, spit and polish. We had inspections every Saturday morning.

DM: Now, Jerry, you've seen the movie *From Here to Eternity*.

GW: Yes.

DM: Is that a fairly reflective...

GW: Well...

DM: ...of what life was like? I mean, obviously there's some stretch, but I mean they filmed it at Schofield Barracks.

GW: Yeah.

DM: When you see that movie, does it remind you of what it was like being up there?

GW: Oh yes, certainly it does.

DM: Yeah.

GW: I don't think life was nearly as depicted in that movie, for the enlisted...

DM: As exciting, you mean?

GW: Not as exciting, yes.

DM: Yeah. Now, what would you do for recreation up there. I mean, was there a...

GW: Well...

DM: ...good place to go off-post where you could have maybe a drink or...

GW: Oh yes. We went—I forget the name of the place—right off the base. I don't know which side. Run by Japanese and he was closed down right after the war started.

DM: Right.

GW: Whoever it was, he had a lot of radio equipment in there. He was funneling information...

DM: Right.

GW: ...Japan, but I never could prove that rumor. But he ran a joint out there. Right on the compound there, we had a beer garden, what we call a beer garden.

DM: Right.

GW: Where you go over and buy a 3.2 beer.

DM: Right.

GW: And recreation, we had to go to all the regimental or football games. We had to go to all the regimental baseball games.

DM: Athletics was a big part of army life, wasn't it.

GW: It was. It certainly was.

DM: Now, were you an athlete? Did you participate in anything?

GW: I played a little basketball, a little baseball, but I never could get above the battery level.

DM: Okay.

GW: I wasn't quite...

DM: 'Cause they took the best guys to put up there, right?

GW: We had intramural, what they called intramural competition today, between the batteries in the regiment. And they'd pick from those games, they'd pick the people who played on the regimental teams.

DM: I don't know if I asked you this, but if I did, excuse me. You were how old when you enlisted in the army?

GW: Eighteen.

DM: Eighteen. When you got to Hawaii you were nineteen then? Would that be safe to say?

GW: No. No, I was still eighteen.

DM: What did you think of army life, your new job?

GW: Well, I was—it was pretty rough for a while, getting used to the regimentation.

DM: Right.

GW: But after that, it didn't bother me.

DM: Did you get homesick at all?

GW: Oh yes, of course...

DM: Yeah.

GW: ...we got homesick.

DM: Sent letters home and the usual?

GW: Yes. Yes.

DM: Now, how did you end up in the Air Corps?

GW: Well, my first sergeant in the artillery, as soon as the Army Air Corps started to expand in the 1940's, got a job down there as first sergeant of the 47th.

DM: Okay.

GW: And he wasn't there very long until he come up and says to put in for a transfer and come on down.

DM: Now that was the...

GW: So I did.

DM: That was the 47th Pursuit Squadron?

GW: That is the 47th Pursuit Squadron.

DM: Those are fighter planes?

GW: Fighter planes.

DM: Okay.

GW: Time I transferred in, they had P-26's and P-36's.

DM: Pretty—well, for that time would they be considered outdated planes?

GW: Yes.

DM: They were a little...

GW: P-26's, of course, were outdated.

DM: Right.

GW: Long time ago.

DM: Yeah.

GW: But the P-36 was considered a fairly up-to-date plane. But then about the summer of 1941, we got the P-40's then.

DM: So you were getting these new slick aircraft, these fighter aircraft.

GW: Fighter aircraft, right.

DM: Right. What was your job in the 47th then?

GW: Well, I was a squadron clerk under my old first sergeant.

DM: Yeah.

GW: And he got promoted eventually and he recommended to squadron commander Major Gordon Austin—he was a captain at that time...

DM: Right.

GW: ...that I take his place and that's the way it happened.

DM: And so you became a sergeant?

GW: First sergeant.

DM: And how much money does a first sergeant make in 1941?

GW: Nineteen forty-one. I think they made eighty-four dollars a month.

DM: Not bad money.

GW: No, not bad money for then, compared to the twenty-one dollars a month I made up in the artillery.

DM: Right. And what were your responsibilities?

GW: Well, I was responsible for running the barracks, taking care of the barracks, seeing it was cleaned and maintaining the discipline in the barracks. And I was also responsible for—we had our own dining hall at that time—overseeing the dining hall. The squadron supply, overseeing that.

DM: Now when you say responsible—and now you've moved from Schofield Barracks to Wheeler Field, right next door.

GW: Right.

DM: What were those responsibilities, let's say for the barracks?

GW: Well, in Schofield Barracks, I was merely a corporal. I didn't have much responsibility at all. Of course, I...

DM: I'm sorry. I mean at Wheeler Field, those barracks, what were your responsibilities there?

GW: Well, make sure they were cleaned everyday.

DM: Squared away?

GW: Assign troops to ensure that they were cleaned.

DM: Right.

GW: And, in general, taking care of the grounds around the barracks. And in addition to that, we had several, all the administrative duties to do, such as...

DM: All the paperwork.

GW: ...maintaining the rosters for details, such as K.P., guard duty and all that. And I also, as part of my commander assignment responsibilities, make detail, maintain the duty rosters for the pilots, what their responsibilities were. They were required them to pull squadron OD and take the reveille formation when they were doing that and so forth.

DM: So you had pilots and you had ground crew?

GW: That's right.

DM: In those days. And basically, you administrated?

GW: Yes.

DM: And then you had non-com[*missioned officer*]s that worked under you?

GW: Yes, I had non-coms, but of course I don't have anything to do with flight line.

DM: Right.

GW: On the flight line, we had a master sergeant who was in charge of the enlisted men down there.

DM: Right.

GW: And I had to work closely with him because he had all the people that I used to do all this other work.

DM: Gotcha.

GW: And he gave me complete cooperation, I'd like to say.

DM: Right.

GW: Anytime I wanted a man to do something, why, he would release 'em. And he didn't have to do that. He was running those airplanes down there for the boss, but his name was Master Sergeant Willamette.

DM: Sounds like a good man.

GW: Good man.

DM: Now, comparing the two, army life, ground troops.

GW: Yes.

DM: Air force, was there a difference?

GW: Oh, world of difference.

DM: So you kinda liked this new job?

GW: Oh, I liked it. I liked the Army Air Corps.

DM: And you liked them planes?

GW: Oh yes. I never had flown on a plane until I went there.

DM: And what'd you get up to, what'd they take you up in?

GW: BT-2B.

DM: Okay. Trainer.

GW: Yes. He said, "Oh, by the way, I can open the cockpit." Two open cockpits.

DM: Right.

GW: First flight I flew the backseat with a Lieutenant Johnny Webster on the way from Wheeler down to Hickam to pick up an aircraft part and then come back.

DM: Now, there at Wheeler, what was your mission? In the large scheme of things, General Short is in charge of the army, the navy's out there, what was the mission as you saw it for the 47th Pursuit Squadron?

GW: Well, the mission was the protection of the Hawaiian Islands...

DM: Right.

GW: ...from any enemy attack.

DM: Right.

GW: That was the major mission.

DM: How were you supposed to respond to that? Was there going—I know that there was an early warning radar system which was being put in place.

GW: Right, and they had direct take-offs any time there was something unidentified coming in, they had direct take-offs to go out and identify it and so forth.

DM: What is...

GW: That was very few incidents.

DM: Right.

GW: Few and far between at that time.

DM: Were you, what the stated policy was that the Army Air Corps or Hawaiian Air Force—which is correct? Was it the Hawaiian Air Force or Hawaiian Air Corps?

GW: Well, the label of the headquarters, Hawaiian Air Force.

DM: Okay. That mission was to...

GW: But individuals were in the Army Air Corps.

DM: So there was a breakdown from that.

GW: Yup. But shortly thereafter, we became the Army Air Forces, when General Hap Arnold assumed...

DM: The helm.

GW: ...autonomy...

DM: Yeah.

GW: ...at the Pentagon.

DM: Okay. Going back to Hawaii and the army, the Hawaiian Air Force, it was the understanding, or at least the standing order, and I want to ask you if you understood this, that the protection of the fleet was the responsibility of the army, when it was in port.

GW: I couldn't verify that.

DM: Okay. But one of your missions was that you were to turn back any attacker.

GW: Yes.

DM: Did you ever envision that Japanese carriers could be part of that attack force?

GW: Negative.

DM: You would probably envision that a fleet would come off of the islands and try to attack by bombardment. Would that be fair?

GW: Yes. Or try to land troops.

DM: Okay.

GW: That was our biggest fear, the landing of troops.

DM: An invasion?

GW: Invasion, yes.

DM: Much has been said about that fateful weekend. There was a lot of alerts. Can you address the issue of alerts as it affected the 47th?

GW: Yes. We were on—actually, the week before Pearl Harbor, we were sent out to Haleiwa so the pilots could get in their gunnery training. Now, Haleiwa was a sand strip out there.

DM: Right.

GW: And nothing on it at all and of course...

DM: So you set up tents and things like...

GW: Set up tents. Took 'em out there. Well, I had a whole week up until December 6, we were under department-wide, Hawaii Department-wide anti-sabotage alert.

DM: Okay.

GW: Well, we had to guard the airplanes individually at night and so forth.

DM: That meant sentries around the planes?

GW: Sentries, well, the crew chief—we didn't have sentries per se...

DM: Okay.

GW: ...because we didn't have that type of people.

DM: Okay.

GW: And the crew chief assumed that responsibility for his airplane.

DM: Right.

GW: And of course he might have two or three people working for him and assigned shifts. But that was our alert status during that first, that week. And then suddenly on December 6, they called off the alert.

DM: Okay. But you were out at Haleiwa when it...

GW: I was out at Haleiwa.

DM: And certainly as first sergeant you were very much aware of that.

GW: Yes.

DM: Because you'd have to implement that action.

GW: Right.

DM: Working with the master sergeant or...

GW: Yeah.

DM: Did—what'd you make of these alerts? In your own view, did you think there was any substance to this or...

GW: Well, of course, all hindsight.

DM: Right.

GW: I couldn't _____ man the [*anti-*]sabotage alert. We had the whole Schofield Barracks up there taking care of the islands and so forth. I didn't think much of it, but we had to do it.

DM: Now, it's obvious that if the sabotage was going to be made, it had to be local Japanese...

GW: Yes.

DM: ...that we're going to be responsible for that. [*Lieutenant*] General Short was quite concerned about that. And in fact, he issued the anti-sabotage alert. There was an alert that came from Washington on the November 29th, very high level. What was that like? What went on with the high level alert?

GW: I don't know. I wasn't in a position to know.

DM: Let me rephrase that.

GW: The only thing I knew is they funneled it along down to us and...

DM: Right, and how did the 47th react to that? That's a fair question.

GW: Well, our pilots, there wasn't much of a reaction because they were there for gunnery training.

DM: Right.

GW: During the day, they'd go out and shoot their targets and come back and that was about it. And then of course we had to guard the base. I only had at my disposal one or two machine guns to guard the base.

DM: Okay. Were those fifties or thirties?

GW: One-caliber, fifty water-cooled.

DM: Was it set in a kind of revetment?

GW: Well, we dug a revetment.

DM: Okay.

GW: And put sandbags around it. Used our armament crews, the only people we had in the squadron qualified to shoot it. And then we had caliber thirty down on the other end of the runway.

DM: And that was...

GW: And all of the troops had...

DM: Oh-threes?

GW: ...Springfield 03s.

DM: Let's talk about that portion of it. You saw these pilots come and go and you know some of these pilots from those days and everything. What in your estimation was the caliber of pilot that we had in '41?

GW: We had some of the greatest pilots in the world.

DM: Hand-picked?

GW: Hand-picked, at that time, for the equipment they were using.

DM: Yeah.

GW: Very advanced. P-40 was a very advanced airplane.

DM: If I was to ask you, and I'm gonna ask you this, if I was to ask you, if you were paging through a scrapbook of these guys...

GW: Yeah.

DM: ...who were the guys you remember in the 47th as some of these, and maybe some little thumbnail sketch about 'em. Something, you know, their nicknames or just tell me a little bit about...

GW: Well...

DM: ...some of those pilots who were in your squadron.

GW: Okay, I can tell you about some of the pilots. George Wilkes was always in trouble. I got to know him pretty well because I sat right outside the commander's door.

DM: Uh-huh.

GW: And just about every Monday morning, Mr. George, or Lieutenant George Wilkes would be sitting out there waiting to see him.

DM: Was he on report?

GW: Something he had done over the weekend. (Chuckles)

DM: Now where was he...

GW: Like flying down and buzzing Waikiki beach or buzzing pineapple workers. That was a big issue over there. The fighter pilots go out and buzz the pineapple workers that worked.

DM: Now, what would that mean, buzzing the pineapple workers?

GW: Well, they'd dive down and try to...

DM: They'd fly down....

GW: Pineapple workers scatter and of course the plantation owners, Dole and those people, the Dillingham's, didn't like that very well.

DM: They'd get pretty...

GW: And so finally they painted big letters on the side of the fighter planes, about that tall so that they could identify these planes.

DM: And Mr. Wilkes got identified rather...

GW: Rather often. He had a great pal. His name was [2nd Lt. C.M.] Parrett.

DM: Okay.

GW: And of course, Parrett left the squadron right after December the seventh. He wasn't involved in that.

DM: Uh-huh.

GW: He flew, but he wasn't involved in any dogfights.

DM: Right.

GW: But he transferred out to the A-20 outfit.

DM: Okay.

GW: [2nd Lt. *Kenneth M.*] Taylor was one of his buddies too and there were, they had a good time. Let's put it that way.

DM: Now I understand that they were card players?

GW: Oh yes.

DM: They liked occasional drink?

GW: Oh yes.

DM: And they did have a particular affinity for the ladies?

GW: Yes.

DM: They were typical fighter pilots, weren't they?

GW: Yes. I wasn't privy to their actions. Of course...

DM: You might have heard something...

GW: ...between the enlisted status and the officer status, I wasn't privy to their off-duty actions.

DM: But stories circulate, right?

GW: Right.

DM: Now, [2Lt. *Philip M.*] "Phil" Rasmussen, who was in another squadron, told me one of the favorite things was to go out and buzz Waikiki Beach.

GW: Yes.

DM: And also to buzz the cruise ships, the *Lurline* and then these pilots would show off. And they knew there was young ladies on board, and try to impress them. Is that fairly...

GW: Well, I don't know. I never heard of 'em buzzing the cruise ships. Probably happened. But I knew about 'em buzzing the Hawaiian workers out in the pineapple fields.

DM: Yeah. And thus the big number...

GW: And buzzing, flying down Waikiki Beach.

DM: And thus those numbers were painted on the side of the planes.

GW: Yes.

DM: Out there at Haleiwa, how did they—I know that they sighted the guns there, on the planes. I guess through the guns, machine guns are aimed to, the bullets to meet at the central point. How was that all done?

GW: Well, I'm not, I wasn't an armorer.

DM: Okay.

GW: ...I wasn't a qualified armorer, so I couldn't tell you.

DM: Did they do that at Haleiwa?

GW: Oh yes.

DM: Okay.

GW: They synchronized and shoot through the props.

DM: Okay.

GW: Now, we didn't have any caliber fifty ammunition out there. We had caliber thirty...

DM: Okay.

GW: ...when the war started. And that's the reason [*2nd Lt. George S.*] Welch and [*2nd Lt. Kenneth M.*] Taylor had to land back at Wheeler to get rearmed...

DM: Right.

GW: ...with the caliber fifty.

DM: Okay. Well, let's kind of accelerate this and go to December 6. You're out at Haleiwa.

GW: Yes.

DM: Anything—the alert has been dropped.

GW: Alert's dropped.

DM: What was December 6, fifty-seven years ago today...

GW: Yes.

DM: ...what was that like for you?

GW: Oh, we had, squadron commander called his pilots together and his ranking officer, [*1st*] Lieutenant Rogers, Robert J. Rogers, was the operations officer, flipped the coin to see who was going to take off and go to town, or go back to Wheeler. And Major [*G.H.*] Austin won and he went back to Wheeler and then went down to Hickam and took off for a flight to go to one of the other islands on a deer hunt.

DM: Big Island, I understand it was.

GW: Big Island, I think.

DM: Right. Yeah.

GW: I'm not sure which one, but it was one of the islands.

DM: I think it was, but okay.

GW: And of course, Robert [*J. Rogers*] had to stay out there to be in command of the operation out yonder. And all of the other pilots went back to Wheeler for a big party on Saturday night. And I say all the others. I don't know for sure whether it was all of them, but most of 'em did. I had a good friend that just visited me, by the name of Hensey, who was a second lieutenant pilot.

DM: Okay.

GW: And he, along with the others, went back to Wheeler, to the Officers' Club for a party on Saturday night.

DM: But you yourself, you stayed out there?

GW: I stayed there. I had to stay there.

DM: Did you chow there or did you go to some local restaurant? I know there was one over in Haleiwa...

GW: Yes.

DM: ...right by the bridge.

GW: Yes. Well, before December the seventh, we had our own mess tent set up.

DM: Right.

GW: Fed our own troops.

DM: Right.

GW: But as soon as the war started, we commandeered the restaurant across the street and made that our dining hall.

DM: Okay. The war has sometimes its plusses. So you went to bed that evening, normally?

GW: We made the rounds of Haleiwa as much as we could.

DM: Right.

GW: There wasn't much there. We made the rounds and came back and went to bed. Had a few beers.

DM: Right. What time did you awake the following day?

GW: Well, I got up early, about seven o'clock the next morning...

DM: Right.

GW: ...and went down. I had my orderly room set up down close to the runway...

DM: Right.

GW: ...in a tent and went down there and just—I had to fill out a morning report every morning.

DM: Right.

GW: Listing all the troops that were available and who was absent and why they were absent and so forth. And I was doing that when I got the word, of the attack.

DM: Let me ask...

GW: But ... one of my clerks back at Wheeler Field, in the barracks...

DM: Telephoned you?

GW: Yes, he told me.

DM: Let me ask you something. This is one of the things. We know the route of the Japanese planes when they flew, they flew down the Waianae coastline. They had to fly right by you guys.

GW: Yeah.

DM: Did you see them? Did you witness the planes?

GW: I personally didn't see 'em. I was inside the tent, but I talked to several crew chiefs...

DM: But could you hear planes or...

GW: Yeah. We heard. We thought the navy was out flying around.

DM: Uh-huh.

GW: I had several crew chiefs tell me that they saw the planes go by and they thought it was navy too.

DM: They're flying at a fair—about 8,000 feet, I understand.

GW: Yeah, they weren't too high.

DM: And...

GW: Of course the fighter planes didn't fly too high back then.

DM: Right. So the planes flew over, at least you could hear some planes flying over.

GW: Yeah.

DM: Thought they were friendly planes. Typical Sunday morning. You get a telephone call. Do you recall what time that was when you got the call?

GW: Oh, I don't know exactly, but my chief clerk was under the desk back at the barracks.

DM: They're raising hell out there.

GW: They're raising hell.

DM: Okay, so you get the phone call and they tell you. What was his words to you? Do you remember?

GW: He says, "It's hell!"

DM: It's hell? Did he tell you who was doing it?

GW: Yes. Says, "Japanese are just bombing all over the place here."

So as soon as he got off the phone, why, operations had gotten another call from their counterparts back at Wheeler.

DM: Okay.

GW: And we, of course, we had everything stacked up out there on the edge of the runway...

DM: At Wheeler.

GW: ...all the tents. No, at Haleiwa...

DM: Okay.

GW: ...and we had our airplanes lined up out there too. So the first thing we did is try to get everything back in the jungle there and camouflage everything.

DM: So you dispersed the aircraft?

GW: And, well, it wasn't even room to disperse the aircraft.

DM: So you camouflaged 'em.

GW: Yeah.

DM: Okay. We're going to stop right at that point.

GW: Okay.

DM: He's going to change tapes. And we'll pick it up right...

END OF TAPE #05

TAPE #06

DM: So, Jerry, you get this phone call.

GW: Yes.

DM: And the Japanese are attacking.

GW: Yes.

DM: Did you—all you knew was Wheeler Field, you didn't know if it was...

GW: I didn't know anything about the navy or...

DM: Could you hear any explosions or reverberations, where you were?

GW: Very, very faintly.

DM: Faintly.

GW: Yes.

DM: Okay.

GW: Well, I can tell you something else now about that time, here come the B-17s in to land at Haleiwa.

DM: A, B-17?

GW: B-17.

DM: Now, where were...

GW: It was part of a flight that was coming over from the Mainland, to land at Hawaii that morning and then go on to the Philippines.

DM: Now that was part of the group that took off from Hamilton Field?

GW: Yes.

DM: And they were under two commands. And one of the guys, I remember, was Major Truman [*H.*] Landon, was one of the...

GW: Well, I don't remember the name of this...

DM: Okay.

GW: ...this pilot that was the chief pilot on the plane.

DM: All right.

GW: But that's the first thing that happened after we got the phone call. This B-17 came in and none of us had ever seen a B-17 before.

DM: Now, how did this B-17 find you guys?

GW: Well, they ran into all this dogfights and so forth and anti-aircraft fire down and around Hickam Field.

DM: Were they directed to go down there, or did they have a chart that...

GW: I don't know.

DM: ...showed?

GW: I don't know.

DM: They just saw it and they...

GW: They just, well, you know, a lot of 'em got shot up.

DM: Right.

GW: Destroyed, before they even hit the ground.

DM: Right.

GW: And this guy, I don't know, maybe he knew about Haleiwa. But he came in and landed on that little old strip...

DM: Can you...

GW: ...and that wasn't much of a strip. It was a sand strip, didn't even have PSB at that time.

DM: So this guy must've been a pretty good pilot to get that plane down. Now, when that plane...

GW: Well, a better pilot to get it off of there.

DM: (Chuckles) When he got that plane down, what did you guys do? Do you have any knowledge of what happened next, because I've seen pictures of this plane sitting there...

GW: Yeah.

DM: ...but it looks like some brush was thrown over it.

GW: Yes. He pulled up on the beach side, under some overhanging brush there. And he got out and tried to camouflage that thing as best as he could do it. To the best of my knowledge, he didn't have any ammunition and we had to finally get him some ammunition.

DM: Yes, they were all out. They didn't have ammunition.

GW: When we got our ammunition supply from back at Wheeler...

DM: Okay.

GW: ...we didn't have them caliber fifties to put on that thing and all he had was caliber fifties.

DM: Right.

GW: And we got the ammunition and supplied him with ammunition.

DM: Now, he flew in during the raid?

GW: He flew in right during the raid.

DM: Now, I don't know if you know this, but I'm going to ask...

GW: And shortly after that, Welch and—[2nd] Lieutenant Welch, [2nd] Lieutenant Taylor—George Welch, Ken Taylor—came barreling in from Wheeler Field in their little Buick convertible.

DM: Well, you anticipated my question. That's very good. There's a scene in the movie *Tora! Tora! Tora!*, where Welch gets on the phone, or Taylor—I can't—he calls down to Haleiwa and tells them to get their planes ready.

GW: We had the planes ready.

DM: So that's kind of a myth?

GW: Yeah. That's movie.

DM: The movie. In actuality, these guys drive up and this sergeant, Master Sergeant Long, I think was the...

GW: London.

DM: London? He's got the planes ready.

GW: Right.

DM: Apparently, according to Ken Taylor, they broke every speed limit rule in the world to drive down...

GW: Well, it's all downhill from Wheeler Field to Haleiwa, as you well know.

DM: And he said they got there fairly quickly.

GW: Yes.

DM: So they come roaring up. Now what happens?

GW: Well, they go out and climb aboard the plane and take off.

DM: Were the planes warming up when they got there?

GW: Yeah, we had the planes warmed up. And then the other pilots came straggling on in. [2nd] Lieutenant [Harry W.] Brown and [Lieutenant] John Dains.

DM: Johnny Dains.

GW: John Dains.

DM: Did you know these guys?

GW: Oh yes. I knew 'em.

DM: They were part of the squadron?

GW: Yes. I knew 'em all. I wasn't—being on a different status...

DM: Right.

GW: Enlisted officers, I knew 'em, but not personally.

DM: Now, you're watching all of this happen, right.

GW: Yes.

DM: What's going through your mind? I mean these guys are going up to fight.

GW: Yes. Well, didn't have time to think. About that time the Japs came over strafing the place.

DM: Tell me about that. What happened? They got there and now some Japanese planes come by.

GW: Just—we only had one.

DM: Was it a fighter or...

GW: It was a fighter. Well, no, it was a bomber.

DM: Okay. Did it have the fixed gear? Dive bomber?

GW: Ooh, I think so.

DM: Okay.

GW: I can't verify that.

DM: All right.

GW: A lot of things I can't remember.

DM: That's all right.

GW: But he come over strafing us and by that time we had the troops all back in the woods and we got off a few shots with their Springfield 03's, but that didn't phase 'em.

DM: How about your machine guns on either end?

GW: Well, the caliber fifty, we didn't have the ammunition for it yet.

DM: Okay.

GW: And the one down at the other end, he got off a few rounds. It didn't do any good.

DM: Now, with...

GW: He came around, he came back around and he opened his—it was a bomber because he opened—excuse me—opened his bomber bay door and he tried to get that B-17 that was on the ground.

DM: Okay.

GW: But he opened the door and there was nothing there. Evidently he had dropped all his bombs somewhere else.

DM: Okay. All right. So this strafing that took place, where did it hit?

GW: It didn't hit anything.

DM: Just came down the runway?

GW: No, he knew we were back in the brush and that's where he tried to go and he tried to get the B-17.

DM: Okay.

GW: That's about the extent of it.

DM: Is it after the strafing that Taylor and Welch get in their planes, or before?

GW: Mmm, no, they were in the air by then.

DM: They were airborne?

GW: Yeah.

DM: There's a scene in the movie, but it kind of gives you a sense of pride that we're starting finally to hit these guys back and these guys take off. Did you have that kind of feeling? Go get those guys.

GW: Yes. Certainly. And of course, George Welch and Ken Taylor, they really had it. They had to go back to Wheeler and land...

DM: Right.

GW: ...to rearm and install that mess and then took off again. Taylor...

DM: But Jerry...

GW: ...no, Welch claimed four.

DM: Right.

GW: And that was evidently verified.

DM: Right.

GW: And Taylor claimed two and two probable, but I think that was later changed to four.

DM: Right. Now, Jerry, I can't help but feel when you talk about Taylor and Welch you have tremendous pride about these guys. 'Cause these guys could have got killed as easy as be heroes.

GW: Just like the rest of the pilots got killed at Bellows...

DM: Right.

GW: ...trying to take off during the attack and Wheeler.

DM: Right. And Johnny Dains got killed that day?

GW: Well, John Dains...

DM: Friendly fire?

GW: Friendly fire. He got—he was in a flight of airplanes so my friend Hensey tells me that he was a P-36 and they were silver-colored.

DM: Right.

GW: And he was flying in the formation with a bunch of P-40's...

DM: Right.

GW: ...bringing up tail end Charlie position. And when they went over Schofield, we assume that they thought that he was a Japanese plane attacking those P-40's and somebody shot him down.

DM: Tragic.

GW: Yeah.

DM: Ken...

GW: In the meantime, Brown, Lieutenant Brown shot down one plane too...

DM: Right.

GW: ...so we had a total of nine that morning out of the twenty-nine.

DM: So the squadron did well. Did really well.

GW: Right. Well, I had the privilege of being with the squadron commander that night when he came back from deer hunting and he almost got shot down coming into Hickam in his B-18.

DM: Geez.

GW: And Welch and Taylor reported to him what was going on. I was standing right there with them.

DM: What was that like?

GW: It was very serious. Very serious.

DM: Your life changed that day, didn't it, Jerry?

GW: Yeah.

DM: Some people have written that for the Pearl Harbor Survivors it was the defining moment of their life. Would you agree with that?

GW: Well, certainly. Of the four or five hundred people here today...

DM: Right.

GW: ...I only knew a few of them over there, but...they're all my friends.

DM: You guys are all united by the tragic events of December 7, comrades in arms. What do you think the American public should remember about that day?

GW: Well, everybody that I've talked to knows exactly what he was doing, where he was when they got the word about the bombing at Pearl Harbor. And they all remember it as we want to go get 'em. And I've talked to several people that said people rushed down to the recruiting lines, tried to enlist. And it was just dismay over the fact that the Japanese stabbed us in the back.

DM: Right. Even to this day, to many survivors, the idea of the surprise attack is distasteful and not part of how America, at that time, would've behaved.

GW: No, we wouldn't behave that way.

DM: Is it fair to say, Jerry, that—some survivors have said this, I want to have your view—that the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese pilots, that some individuals don't blame the pilots, they were doing their job. Their real complaint is with the government that made them do that job. And given the same circumstances, ordered to attack, Americans would've, in the military

at that time, wouldn't question that. That was their job. Do you agree with that or...

GW: Well, yes, to a certain extent. You know some of the Japanese pilots that participated in that raid have become good friends with some of the American pilots that survived.

DM: Right.

GW: And I don't know whether it's good friends, but they tolerate each other.

DM: Right. I've seen it.

GW: And they respect the fact that the individual pilots have no, couldn't have reneged. If they had, they'd have probably been executed right there. They were just following orders. And that's the one thing about the American pilots. When they shoot down somebody, they don't feel like they've killed an individual.

DM: What do they feel like?

GW: They feel like, from what I've been able to ascertain, they feel like they're just doing their job, getting rid of that airplane out there that's trying to do harm to the United States.

DM: Jerry, when you eventually made your way up to Haleiwa Field.

GW: Yes.

DM: It must have been devastating seeing that place. Was it?

GW: From Haleiwa back to Wheeler?

DM: When you got to Haleiwa and you saw what had happened there, what were your...

GW: We—nothing happened to us at Haleiwa.

DM: Right.

GW: When we went back to Wheeler, what we saw was devastating. Our barracks, the bullet holes in the walls, bomb craters all around and down on the runway. Our hangar...

DM: Could you go down to see the flight room?

GW: Oh yeah. Our hangar was Hangar Number Two.

DM: Okay.

GW: Of course, we were never reassigned back to Wheeler from Haleiwa. The 47th [*Pursuit*] Squadron there from Haleiwa went on to spend a month at Bellows later on.

DM: Right.

GW: While we put PSB down on Haleiwa Airfield. And then as soon as they got that laid, we came back to Haleiwa again. And we stayed at Haleiwa as long as I was with the squadron. I left the squadron in May 1942. I got promoted to warrant officer and they wouldn't let me stay in the same squadron.

DM: Okay.

GW: So I went over to the [*Captain James O.*] "Jim" Beckwith squadron, the 72nd [*Pursuit Squadron*] and worked for him for a while, until I came back.

DM: And then you went out in the Pacific, right.

GW: What?

DM: Did you go out in the Pacific with the Pineapple Air Force?

GW: No. I didn't. I was sent back to go to OCS [*Officers Candidate School*], Miami Beach...

DM: Okay.

GW: ...and become a ninety-day wonder.

DM: And that became your career as an officer?

GW: Yes.

DM: Which eventually culminated with you serving over thirty years?

GW: Right.

DM: And retiring as a lieutenant colonel.

GW: Right.

DM: That's an unbelievable career.

GW: I'm happy about it. I've been on the payroll almost sixty years now.

DM: If I could take you back to—I know this is difficult because that—I talked to Ken Taylor...

(Conversation off-mike)

DM: Okay. He's going to change battery.

GW: Oh, okay.

DM: Take a minute.

(Taping stops, then resumes)

GW: Run out of juice. Come over, we'll take you out there...

DM: Okay.

GW: ...because I'd like to go there too. Signs up all over the place, no trespassing.

DM: I can get you in.

GW: Okay.

DM: Okay. Jerry, when you eventually got to Wheeler Field and saw what had happened, could you believe it? Could you believe what you were seeing and...

GW: Pretty unbelievable.

DM: Did you make it over to your hangar for the 47th?

GW: Well, we went down to the hangar and viewed the damage down there.

DM: How bad was it?

GW: Well, the hangar was just demolished and all the airplanes. We had a couple, two or three airplanes in it. I don't recall how many.

DM: Uh-huh.

GW: But they were completely destroyed.

DM: And that was Hangar Two?

GW: Hangar Two.

DM: Did you see the carnage of what was left of the planes on the runway?

GW: Oh yes. Yes. They had just taken 'em—by then, they had taken bulldozers.

DM: They were in piles.

GW: Piles. Our barracks, we had several chunks of our barracks knocked out. In fact, I had a room on the second floor. As first sergeant, I had a private room.

DM: Right.

GW: And I wasn't married then. I had a room on the second floor and there was a big chunk of the wall knocked out of there.

DM: Where your room was?

GW: Where my room was.

DM: So that if you'd have been there...

GW: Well, I don't know, it didn't destroy the building or anything, but just bullet marks, pockmarks all over the place.

DM: Were you angry after this event?

GW: Oh, well certainly. Everybody was angry, mad.

DM: Was it...

GW: In fact, it wasn't mad that we were fighting so much as the fact that they'd sneaked in and stabbed us in the back. And nobody knew they were coming, supposedly.

DM: Right.

GW: And that was pretty hard to swallow.

DM: Were you, as soldiers, airmen, were you able to differentiate between the local Japanese and these guys that came from Japan, in Hawaii? Was that possible, or was the hate, anger such that you saw all of these Japanese as maybe in cahoots with this thing and...

GW: Well, for a while, all the Japanese were under suspicion.

DM: Right.

GW: I told you about the man outside the gate there at Schofield Barracks.

DM: Right.

GW: You probably know about him. I don't recall his name. He ran a bar...

DM: Right.

GW: ...right inside.

DM: I think we have that name in a previous interview.

GW: Yeah, I think it's up there by what used to be the polo field.

DM: Right.

GW: And I never did know personally, but I heard that he had been...

DM: Involved in something, picked up.

GW: ...involved.

DM: A lot of people were picked up, you know, and not charged but everybody was suspect.

GW: Well, yeah, just look at the West Coast, they picked up all the Japanese and put 'em in shelters.

DM: Right. One of the things that, as we—and is there anything you want to talk about that we didn't cover in this?

GW: No, not really, I don't think.

DM: You know one thing, Jerry, when did you find out that the fleet got hit too?

GW: What?

DM: When did you find out that the fleet, the navy, had got hit pretty bad too?

GW: Well, we didn't—I don't know. It must have been a couple days later or everything we heard was by rumor.

DM: Okay.

GW: We heard rumors that the Japanese were...

DM: Landing.

GW: ...landing. And of course, we didn't have any defense at all out at Haleiwa, except for those two machine guns and our 03.

DM: People a little trigger-happy that night?

GW: Oh yes. We had one, one of the crew chief shoot up a prop on an airplane. Thought he saw somebody under the airplane. And the guy that held down the caliber thirty machine gun at the other end of the runway cut loose during the night with his machine gun. I think, rumor has it that he shot a mule that was across the street.

DM: People were pretty scared?

GW: Yeah. People were pretty scared. They—well, you could hear firing all the time.

DM: Yeah.

GW: The army was scattered all over the place.

DM: Sure.

GW: And anything that moved, why, it got shot at.

DM: That night some planes flew in...

GW: Yeah.

DM: ...from the *Enterprise* and I guess the commander, he flew in and was shot at.

GW: Mm-hm.

DM: When did things start to calm down a little? Did it take a couple weeks or...

GW: Well, everybody was on edge for the first week or so and then it started to calm down. We would more or less go back into a routine. As I told you, we took over the restaurant as our dining hall.

DM: Right.

GW: We probably had the best dining hall that was anybody in the field at that time.

DM: It was your own private restaurant.

GW: Yes. Well, our cooks ran it, but...

DM: Jerry, in closing this interview, I'd like to ask you, why did you join the Pearl Harbor Survivors and what does this organization mean to you?

GW: Well, I didn't know about it until, hmm, about 1991 or '92?

DM: Really?

GW: No. I was in the service. We had our own agenda in the service. I never heard about the organization until Louisiana passed a law that says you could get a special license plate. So I said, "I want one of those."

Well, I applied for it and sent in my money and they came back and said, "Well, you have to get approval of Pearl Harbor Survivors Association."

DM: Really?

GW: Yes. So I filled out that paperwork and got my license plate and joined the outfit.

DM: And that was in '91?

GW: Yes. Well, I'm not positive.

DM: Yeah, somewhere in the nineties, early nineties.

GW: Yes. See, I got that first plate on my old truck. That was—well, I can't really tell.

DM: Okay.

GW: I don't remember.

DM: But to make a—you joined the Pearl Harbor Survivors, and as you mentioned, there's this great camaraderie...

GW: Yes.

DM: ...with guys. What does the Pearl Harbor Survivors stand for, in your view? What will be their legacy when it's all said and done? As you know, the USS *Arizona* Memorial is going to be a recipient of many of your club's organizational artifacts and such. What does it mean, that the survivors, in your view?

GW: Well, it's a chance to get together and renew old friendships.

DM: Right.

GW: And everybody is a buddy...

DM: Right.

GW: ...regardless of whether you knew 'em or not. I didn't know hardly any people in the navy. I knew a few people in the army and I knew quite a few in the Army Air Corps. But now, they're all my friends. The navy, if they get a little huffy every once in a while, I always remind them that the Army Air Corps took the first two prisoners-of-war. Out at Bellows Field.

DM: Right.

GW: That midget sub.

DM: Right.

GW: Sub landed.

DM: Right.

GW: And we have a great time about that.

DM: Yup. So you still, there's still this branch rivalry, but it's in a very friendly way, right?

GW: Yes. And one thing I like about the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, versus the VFW [*Veterans of Foreign Wars*] and the American Legion, is the fact that women are included. And they go to all our chapter meetings and our banquets and so forth. They don't have the vote, but they're included.

DM: So it has a social implication.

GW: Social. And it's gradually becoming more of a social organization as years go by because nobody wants the responsibility any more of keeping the books and writing out the minutes of the meeting, and all that kind of business. They just want to get together and have a good time. And that's what we do.

DM: What is, Jerry, the legacy of Pearl Harbor?

GW: Well, I think it pointed out one thing, that we can't ever be relaxed at the extent that somebody can sneak in and attack us. And I think our armed forces today are for combat.

DM: I'm sorry, can you repeat that? I missed that. You think our armed forces today are...

GW: Their readiness, their equipment and so forth, the way they have been funded, are direct outcome of what happened at Pearl Harbor. We don't let ourselves relax.

DM: And that is the motto of the survivors.

GW: Yes.

DM: To keep America alert...

GW: That's right.

DM: ...and to remember Pearl Harbor.

GW: Right.

DM: In the future, you know, twenty years from now, someone's going to look at this tape and see you and all these other survivors we've interviewed. How would you guys like to be remembered?

GW: Well, not all of us are heroes. But we did just by...

DM: You did serve?

GW: Right. And I'm proud of the fact to serve. I spent—World War II wasn't very hard on me, outside of December 7, because I came back and OCS was made a, after I got my commission, was made a gunnery training officer for the B-17's. And I was assigned a B-17 combat crew-training unit, organization, at England Air Force Base in Louisiana, Alexandria Air Base at that time. And was responsible for training all the crew gunners that came from there. You know, they had to make up a crew, send them there to train on their aircraft, and then they go somewhere else to pick up the aircraft and fly overseas.

DM: Right.

GW: And I lost my train of thought.

DM: That's okay. But bringing you back into focus, you know after all these years of service that we've talked about, and the opportunities that World War II meant, one writer wrote that it was a very dangerous time to be young, World War II.

GW: Oh absolutely.

DM: And what we've seen recently is a lot of young people realizing what you fellows and ladies contributed to during World War II. Does it make you proud that the nation, even at this late date, recognizes you through films, like *Saving Private Ryan*?

GW: Oh, certainly.

DM: That you guys did an unbelievable job?

GW: Right.

DM: Is that part of the pride you talk about?

GW: Oh yes. Matter of fact, right before I left to get out here, I had a call from the public broadcasting system of Louisiana, wanted to interview a bunch of us. And they had a television show on Friday night. I haven't been able to see it yet.

DM: Uh-huh.

GW: I didn't get interviewed because I was too far away. They didn't have enough money to come see me, but I referred 'em to a bunch of members of the chapter in the New Orleans area and they interviewed those people. I also had a call from a father of a young man who was—Pearl Harbor, there's a social subject project. And...

DM: As a school project?

GW: School project. And he wanted names of people that he could interview and what not, they have in pictures, memorabilia and so forth, that he could

include in this project. And that happens all the time. In fact, all my grandkids have done it once.

DM: This will be probably a hard question, but certainly my last one. What do you tell your grandkids about this thing, this event? How do you explain Pearl Harbor to them?

GW: I really don't talk much about it.

DM: You don't?

GW: No.

DM: Is it difficult to talk about it?

GW: Yes.

DM: Can I ask you why that's difficult?

GW: Well, there's, what, 2400, 3500 servicemen buried out there in Punchbowl?

DM: Twenty-four hundred killed, not all of them buried there but a great many of them.

GW: Yes. And another thousand wounded.

DM: More than that.

GW: Yes. And I just don't like to talk about it, that's all.

DM: It's because...

GW: I was fixing to tell you. I spent the rest of the war stateside, but they got me in Korea. I spent the whole damn war in Korea. And we even got up above and froze in Chosen for a while.

DM: Okay.

GW: We were moving wings around, wings of airplanes around.

DM: Right.

GW: And you know, we got evacuated from the [*Hungnam*] area, right before Christmas. And came back down the coast in an LST, and would you believe the crew that was on the LST, Japanese crew.

DM: Your allies now.

GW: Yes.

DM: You'd come full circle.

GW: Right.

DM: Well, Jerry, I'd like to thank you for this interview. It's—you've really shared some really interesting and, in some cases, information I was unaware of, so on behalf of the National Park Service, thank you so much for doing this interview with us.

GW: Well, privileged to be here.

DM: We'll get that off you.

GW: Oh, okay. I don't want to...

END OF INTERVIEW