

Paul Marsico #97
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Q: Mr. Marsico, let me ask you to start with, when did you first join the Army?

A: 1940. May, 1940.

Q: How did you happen to get into the [Army] Air Corps?

A: I went to Aeronautical Trade School in New York, and I was inclined to study toward the Air [Corps]. The Army wanted to put me in all different branches of service, which I didn't particularly want to get into. So I waited a few months and they got me assigned for overseas. I didn't have much choice in the matter. The Sgt. just stamped it and said, "Where would you like to go?" I says, "Hawaii." and he already had it there. So that was it (laughter).

Q: When did you first come to Hawaii?

A: Uh, June, 1940.

Q: What duties did you have with the 11th [Bombardment] Group.

A: Well, when the War broke out, I was actually in Headquarters Squadron Hawaiian Air Force. After that they formed the 98th [Bombardment] Squadron, which was a part of the 11th [Bombardment Group]. They disbanded that Headquarters Squadron. But I went to AM school there in 1940 (mechanics school). I was assigned to Headquarters Squadron. I was on the flight line. I had worked up to Buck Sgt. 1st AM, when the War broke out. I had an O-47B aircraft; the old North American observation plane.

Q: What kind of.... well, how would you describe that aircraft?

A: It was a single engine, three place, observation plane, with a camera in the belly, and it was used to go out and spot emplacements from the air; see how their camouflage was and their gun emplacements and so forth. But it was used primarily by the Headquarters people to get instrument time in, because it was one of the few single engine airplanes on the Base that had a canopy; that you can close inside your canopy. And you can get instrument time "under the hood" (they used to call it "under the hood" then). So all the general officers, and all the staff officers and so forth, from Headquarters Squadron Hawaiian Air Force used to like to fly in that airplane so they could get the instrument time in.

Q: What was your daily routine like, just before the... in the week or so just before the attack?

A: Oh, primarily going up preflight in the aircraft, servicing the aircraft, and helping the pilots in it; occasionally going along as a safety observer in the back seat and land the

airplane, service it up, and time was on your own. You put in about maybe eight... and then if you had night flying you'd have to go out in the evening. But it was normal operations on an even keel. No excitement. No pressure. Very pleasant working conditions. We had a lot of training when the airplane was flying.

Sgt. Dave Jacobson was our line chief at the time; used to take us into a little area and teach us radio code. And he'd always teach us to do things the hard way because he had a premonition. He said, "One of these days, we're going to be at War." and he says, "You ain't gonna find shops. You're not going to find the facilities you got here, and you're not learning how to do things in the field." So a lot of times we'd just try working on the field conditions. He was a very, very, knowledgeable individual. He had 28 years service and he was killed on the 7th.

Q: Oh really.

A: Yeah. He was from New York. He was a Master Sgt. and his name was Dave Jacobson.

Q: What were you doing on the morning of the 7th when the attack took place?

A: Reading the newspapers and reading the funny papers, and I was in the barracks, the wooden barracks, on the north side of the parade ground. And I was a Bay Chief, and my window, I could look right into Pearl. I looked over past the hospital right into Pearl Harbor. I was facing the hospital but I could see right into Pearl because Pearl Harbor is on the other side of the hospital from the barracks.

And I heard the explosions and seen the debris going up. And the first plane I seen coming by us with a big red ball on it, I didn't even know what country it was. I knew we were being shot at, but I didn't know by who. I mean that's how naive we were, I mean, in my element; just the average working guy on the line, flight chief, crew chief, and so forth. We weren't involved with the politics. The nation at the time, was I strongly interested in politics, just doing my job, and that's about it.

Q: What did you do then, when you first realized that you were under attack?

A: Well, how to get some guys out of the barracks, especially the upstairs portion of the barracks the hard way. They didn't believe it, you know? I says, "Hew, somebody's shooting! Get the hell out of here!" you know. A couple of the beds I got, like Sgt. Carrol(??) that lived on the other side. I took this bed and dumped it, to dump him out of bed.

And everybody went down stairs to the lower floor and of course there was a lot of strafing and bombing going on at the time. Then we made our way down to the almond shop, where we picked up our weapons and so forth.

And about that time the first raid had just about subsided and we went down to the main hangar (our hangar... it was in Hangar 7) and it was completely demolished actually. Between the first raid and the

second raid they completely did away with the hangar, you know, demolished quite a bit. And we lost a B-18 in there and quite a few friends of mine got hurt in that one.

We were in the hangar when they hit the second time. We were trying to salvage equipment in there. We were moving guns out, typewriters, parachutes, whatever you want. I still got a parachute bag that I took out of that hangar, when it was burning. And I took it, and I was going to carry it with me. I took it out of the locker that was burning and I just threw it into another locker that wasn't where it was burnt. And about a week or so later I remembered it and went back and got it. I still have it; it's home (laughter).

Q: So...

A: It was chaos because you were totally unprepared for it. There was no foxholes. There were no gun emplacements. Like I went... when I went down the hangar, I went through the barracks. And when I come by the second time, when they hit the barracks, I had lockers and everything, just debris in lockers right and blowin' right over me. I lost my wrist watch, I had a cut on my arm, and I had plaster. I had a swollen lip just from plaster being blown. And when we crossed the parade ground, there were some men trying to set up a machine gun emplacement on the parade ground. They were all laying down; they were just out. I mean frag bombs got them in that area.

Q: Did anybody get any shots off against the Japanese?

A: No, small arms fire that our guys, that we picked up... What are we going to shoot at them with...a .45? There were some people of course that had shots. The people down by the Bay fired on them. They had some machine guns set up there. And the second raid, it was a lot more fire, coming from the Navy and Ft. Weaver, and you know, the immediate area... anti-aircraft fire and other fire. Then there was from, say from Hickam or the first raid. The first raid there wasn't much return fire. There was some but not enough.

Q: Which directions did the Japanese planes come in from?

A: I haven't the slightest idea. I just seen them come right across the parade ground. I mean, the first one I seen come right over the hospital from Pearl Harbor, come over the hospital right across the parade ground heading towards base ops. They had a big torpedo embankment and there was a guy in the back with a machine gun. And they're just spraying all over the place. There's a couple of them that come by after that. But what approach they made to the Island, just where I read in the papers and see in the movies. Course they were just all over the place after they arrived at Pearl and Hickam. I've seen the Hawaiian Air Depot [HAD] go up.?

Q: What did that look like?

A: HAD? Oh the two big enormous (well in those days they were enormous hangers down on the end of the field and I just seen the debris. I happened to be looking in that direction when I seen

all the debris go up. That was hit about the same time that our mess hall was hit, and the *Arizona*, the Battleship Row, just all happened all one time.

Then of course when they come back the second time they hit different targets. What surprised me is that they didn't get the fuel tanks at uh, at Hickam... not Hickam but Pearl; the big fuel tanks... They didn't get the fuel tanks at all.

Now, they dropped a whole bunch of bombs (and this might be an interesting story for historians... not too many people know this). They dropped a whole bunch of bombs in an area that was supposed to be fuel storage tanks. When I arrived in 1940, uh, before I went to AM school, I worked for a man named Mr. Peoples and he was in charge of planting uh... We planted the old trees around the Officer's Club, the trees down the center line of the boulevard at Hickam. It was a detail type of thing.

Now he had a map. In fact, after I worked for him a week or two, he used the map and he said, "Well pick up these flowers and bring them here and plant them here. Now there was an area on that map that was designated as a POL area, which was a petroleum area (storage area). They never put that storage area in. They never used that as a storage area.

Q: Where was that?

A: It was in Hickam. They never designated that. Evidently some Jap must have had this old map because they dropped a bunch of bombs there and there was no POL area there.

Q: Was there anything there at all?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: It was just dirt (laughter)... dirt and grass.

Q: Did the Japanese planes seem to be flying in any kind of formation?

A: Oh yeah, especially on the second raid, you could see them in formation. The first raid we were too busy to even notice. We were too busy to even notice. Like we, trying to get the guys just out of the first floor, and get them out of the first floor, get them down stairs, and get them dispersed; just trying to cover up. And this was enough in itself so ... uh... We weren't paying attention on how... if they were flying in formation, flying, or what they were doing. I mean I wasn't, personally. There might have been some people that were.

Q: Did you work in the clean up effort after the attack?

A: Oh definitely.

Q: What did you do there?

A: Oh, well, we had some B-17's that crashed on the field that needed work on. We had to clear stuff out of the hangar. Well, during the day of the attack, we were still clearing stuff out of

the hangar, because the hangar was burning and we wanted to save things. So we formed a daisy chain; we pulled typewriters, guns, and stuff we pulled out of the supply room, that was in the Hangar 7. That's went a friend of mine, Richard, on the second raid got shrapnel across his back.

Q: Who was that?

A: Richard Kam(?) I believe... Kam. I got his picture and name in a book. Uh, he was on my crew, and we lost several people in the outfit. One guy had an old Model A Ford, uh, that got blown up and he got killed in that. He was driving it out of the parking lot near the old snake ranch. You'll see pictures of our beer garden; the wooden beer garden destroyed. Well, he had his car in that area and a frag bomb hit in that and wiped him out.

But it was a type of a thing that uh, was a complete surprise. I think that most of the men; the higher ups might have known or had an indication that it was something like this happening. But I think the average Buck Sgt., PFC, Corporal, whatever you want to call it, the average working guy around there, was not aware of it; unless he was a politically motivated guy who read newspapers and stuff. We read the comics first, you know. And they didn't follow all the national politics. So I know nobody on my crew or anybody knew. And a fellow named Mike Capuanl kept running around saying, "Where's the baby! Where's the baby!" you know... (laughter)

Q: What was his name?

A: Mike Capuanl.

Q: How do you spell that?

A: C-A-P-U-A-N-L. I haven't seen him in years.

Q: Things must have been pretty tense right after the attack.

Q: Well, strangely enough, things... people had things to do, and you were so engrossed in doing the things (at least I was). Uh, we went up set up gun emplacements up at the, what they call the "Bomb Dump Road." And by that time we had guns. Like I had... somebody had handed me a BAR. Now I didn't need a BAR no more than the man in the moon. It was 118 pounds soaking wet and I fired one time with it and the darned thing run away. So I gave it away for a 1903 Springfield.

But we set up gun emplacements up the "Bomb Dump Road". Then after we set them in, then I thought about my car. I had a 1935 Ford, a sports model Ford, and it was in a parking lot down near the barracks (near the main barracks). So it was in the parking lot and they had dumped frag bombs iin there and they had the car (a whole bunch of cars) burnt. Mine had a lot of bullet holes in it and had the two rear tires flat, completely flat, and shrapnel through the tires, and my spare tire in the trunk, I had a bullet hole go through that... the rim, you know, the old '35 sports car had the rim thing in the back? That tire was shot out.

So we went and seen a man named Tim. Tim, Sgt. Tim, now was it

Tim Wood. Anyway, his father used to work down at the motor pool. And he says, "Go down and see my dad and he'll give you some replacement tires for it." So we took me and another guy that owned the car; we took it down. We went down there and got the tires and right at the parking lot, and there was still cars burning and everything. The old hand... tire irons, changing tires hand pump. We put the new tires on and drove the car; rode the car out of the way.

It was shot up a little bit. We had to... the roof interior was up on it. It had the mesh type with the tar paper roof or whatever you want to call it... cloth roof. That had completely blown up and I had a bullet hole right through the window, right in front of the driver and it was a ... I don't think it was a bullet hole. It was probably a piece of shrapnel. We had to patch it up. We put a washer front and back and put a bolt through it to keep the glass from shattering anymore. And we patched it up so it got us around.

Strangely enough the car ran. I mean nothing was....working... no working mechanism on the car was hurt. The car

next to me was partially

burnt and the one next to that was completely burnt, and same way on the other side. I just happened to be in the center where it was the least damage. So we lucked out on the car.

And then we used the car to haul... the rumor went around, "Don't drink the water." right? Big rumors went around, "Don't drink the water." So we went down to the snake ranch, that was bombed (the old building) and we got soda pop and stuff like that and put it in the car and brought it all up to the area where we were all setting up emplacements up by the old bomb dump road. Some used the car to haul stuff around in.

But everybody was engrossed in doing something that I don't think you were really concerned about the long range. I think it was just the immediate part of survival. Because there were rumors going around that they had landed down in Honolulu, Ft. DeRussy and they were coming up in that area, you know. There was all this typed of thing; very, very unorganized in some places.

Q: What's the one thing that you remember most vividly of all your experiences there on Dec. 7th?

A: Probably that airplane coming across the parade ground with that red ball on it, and I didn't even know what country it was. And I can still see the guy in the airplane with the helmet on, and I can just still vividly see this guy going by. But at that time I didn't know what country it was. Of course as the day progressed we figured it out, but immediately we didn't know at the moment it happened (laughter). And the disbelief of some of the guys that we were under attack. Some guys come in late Saturday night you know, and they wanted to sleep, and you had to take and throw them out of bed.

Q: Well, thank you. I appreciate your coming by to...

A: Oh, you're quite welcome... quite welcome.

Q: ... share with me what you remember.