

Ralph Osterhoudt #39
December 8th, 1984

Q: Mr. Osterhoudt when did you first join the Army?

A: Sept. 24th, 1940.

Q: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

A: I enlisted.

Q: Where did you do your basic training?

A: Really, I had no basic training. I enlisted for the Signal Corps. I had to be a high school graduate to get in there and what little basic training I had, it was done right there on Hickam Field.

Q: When did you arrive in Hawaii?

A: January 30th, 1941.

Q: What was the first unit you were assigned to?

A: 328th Signal Aviation Company.

Q: What did you do there?

A: I was a teletype operator.

Q: What did that job involve?

A: I operated a teletype machine in the uh... this company that was attached to the 7th Air [Corps Squadron].

Q: So you handled messages that were coming in and going out?

A: Coming in and going out between all the fields on the Island.

Q: Did you have that job on December 7th, 1941?

A: No, I didn't. I had it but I was a man that never missed a breakfast, and I was up having breakfast that morning and a fellow came in and wanted me to relieve him while he went down to eat. He was on guard duty at a little radio station in our outfit, and I said, "Sure." Dressed in two tone sandal shoes and a T-shirt, it was just a temporary job but [it] was in the center of Hickam Field.

Q: At what point did you notice that there was something out of the ordinary going on?

A: Well, when I got there on duty that morning, it was a Sgt. Edgar Johnson. He lives in Vermont right now. And he was the Sgt. in charge of the power station. And he says, "We're going

to have another, uh... the Japanese are going to attack again this morning." Because about every weekend there was rumor for two or three months that's been going on like that. You get the rumor that the Japanese are going to hit. And we're standing outside the power station, radio power station and we're watching and we see these planes come down over... well it would be from the Wheeler Field area, down in the valley there over Pearl Harbor. See them peel off over there, come down drop their bomb.

Q: What did you think when you first saw that... those planes?

A: Another Navy alert... or Army, Navy, or somebody was just I figured another routine, and we made comments of it. And of course, by the time the second one had dropped his bomb, the first one was right over top of our heads. Then it was just a matter of moving. And of course, then I was a very short distance from our headquarters where the teletype was. I ran over there and of course I sent a message to HD, which is Hawaiian Department, over at Fort Shafter. And of course then I got a little comment back on there... I can't remember now what it was, but they made some comments about the Japanese and everything... that it was impossible you know...so I was just fooling around. And I put S.O.S., S.O.S., and I went back down to the power station.

Q: And what did you do down there?

A: I stayed there until I was relieved, probably in about well, had to probably about an hour because I had a command car with me that I rode up there to on, and I would almost think maybe I might have been... I don't know I could have been, probably took the first one that was injured on Hickam Field to the hospital. Because a fellow came across from the hangar line out to where I was and he had his left arm shot off. It was just hanging by tendons or something. It was bleeding real bad. And we wanted to stop the bleeding and he said no get me to the hospital. So I stuck him into that and took him up to the hospital, dropped him off and came back.

Q: How close were the bombs falling to your post?

A: Oh, probably within, I'll guess... 100 feet. It was close.

Q: Were there a lot of strafers around?

A: I... the car that I had that morning, I was hit three times that morning just coming back down the boulevard from the hospital. That's the only strafing that I got myself. Uh, originally this field where the signal power station was, was originally the location of all the fuel for Hickam, and apparently they must have had the maps I guess that they found, that they didn't realize that the storage had been moved from there down towards the main gate. So, I think that's the reason that they bombed that field because that was where they thought all the fuel was stored, and that's where the bombs were hitting that morning when I...

Q: So, it sounds like you had kind of a grand stand seat on it.

A: Oh yeah, yeah, I was there close enough... real close yeah.

Q: Could you see any of the planes that were parked on the ground?

A: Out on the field itself?

Q: Yeah.

A: No. No, I was far enough away where I couldn't see the planes on the field itself.

Q: Could you see any of the hangars?

A: Yeah, I could see the hangars, yeah.

Q: What happened to the hangars that you could see?

A: Well, they were, my gosh they were... you could almost say they were just being... they were bombing that...uh, dropping bombs there and just setting on fire and that's about all I could see really.

Q: Were you alone at the post or were there other people there?

A: No, this Sgt. Johnson was with me.

Q: Did the two of you decide to stay there or...?

A: Yeah... yeah. Well, that was his station for the power. He was a radioman and it was guarded by one man; we took turns doing that and of course I just relieved him while he went, but the Sgt. stayed right there. Uh, apparently they didn't even get a chance to eat breakfast that morning.

Q: And how long did you stay there?

A: Well, I'd say maybe a matter of a half to three quarters of an hour because by the time I had been there a little while, and had been up to the hospital and back, uh, maybe 15 minutes after that I went back to my station as teletype operator.

Q: What did you do there?

A: Just took care of messages as they came in on the teletype.

Q: What sort of messages were coming in?

A: (sigh)... It's almost impossible to remember what some of those were. It was just a matter of... uh, like Wheeler Field, and Schofield, and Bellows Field, we were getting messages from them and it was just a case that they were being hit at such and such a time; Pearl Harbor too, that was under our jurisdiction there.

Q: So how long did you stay at your post there, at your machine?

A: Uh, let's see... I would say maybe until about 11:00[AM] and then we got the orders that we were going to pull out, and it wasn't too much longer, shortly after noon, we were heading back up in the hills.

Q: Did they establish a new communication center in the hills?

A: Yeah... yeah.

Q: Do you remember about where that was, or...?

A: It was up... I keep thinking it was the Moanalua Crater. Now it was up near Ft. Shafter which is headquarters of the Hawaiian Department.

Q: Would that have been Aliamanu Crater?

A: Could have been the Aliamanu Crater... yeah. Because originally it was an ammunition storage crater up in there. It had tunnels through there where they used to store stuff and we sat around in one of those tunnels. [*Radio and telephone units were also setup within the crater.*]

Q: What was the general atmosphere? What kind of talk was going around up there?

A: That day, well it really wasn't until that night probably, uh, it was just a matter of getting things set up. They were running lines so we would know what was going on. During the evening, and this probably started in around midnight, they had been getting messages coming in from... well, you get them from all over. Messages were coming in: Unknown object sighted so many yards off shore. And so they got down where they were landing at Fort [*Kamehameha*], flying at Hickam, and that went from there to: Paratroopers are landing in such and such a sugar cane field. And then we would have to send out messages to there to relay that message, so they could "bird" us. Well they were supposed to be "birding" the fields; now that's what I understood they were supposed to be doing. Whether they did or not, I don't know.

Q: Did that sort of message traffic go on all night?

A: All night long, yeah... all night, yeah.

Q: How long did you remain there in the Crater?

A: Uh, well let's see, of course I didn't get any sleep that night and the next day, well it was the wee hours of the next night before I got any sleep. But I stayed up in that Crater until I think it was April, when I moved back over there. We were over there quite a while.

Q: What one incident or impression remains in your memory stronger than any other?

A: Oh... things happened so fast there at Hickam that I can't say anything special right there. Probably that first night was the worst night; you had time to stop and think a little bit and begin to realize what was going on.

Q: What were you thinking?

A: Well... you pray a little bit. By golly, you think back home and wonder whether your mother ever heard about it and whether you were ever going to make it back or not. It got to the point where they said they were landing and beginning to land on Hickam and Fort [*Kamehameha*], and you know darn well they're getting pretty close if they're doing that. I really didn't think I was going to make it through that night. No... I really didn't... So, but then of course we used to send letters out, or send radio grams out that we were alright. I sent one; my mother never got it until Dec. 24th. So she didn't know until the 24th that I was still alive... yeah... Quite an experience.

Q: Yeah, must have been.

A: But it just didn't seem possible that a little country like Japan could ever do something like that, you know?

Q: Yeah. Guess people just underestimated...

A: Yeah... right. Yeah, I had a fellow [*George Truesdell*] in my outfit, I just went to his funeral the other day down in Norwich, New York; and I had seen him twice since then. So Norwich is only 60 or 70 miles, in there. But he had just moved up there. I didn't realize he had moved up there just recently, because he was down in Walton which is quite a ways a way. But we talked to the missus and come to find out, you know she had never let us know but he had had a heart attack, and several of them. He had to retire ten years ago, and he just passed away. So I've met quite a few of them through the Pearl Harbor Conventions. I communicate with quite a few of them now I still write letters back and forth.

Q: Well, thank you.

A: Yeah, real good!

Q: I appreciate your coming up here and taking the time to contribute to our program.

A: Well, yeah... I hope(tape ends)