

Richard Young #47
February 7, 1985

Q: Mr. Young, how long had you been with the Honolulu Fire Department on December 7, 1941?

A: Mr. Slackman, I was in for 8 months, having entered the Department on April 1, 1941.

Q: What station were you working at then?

A: I was originally assigned and still serving duty at the Kalihi Fire Station, Engine Company Number 6.

Q: How long had you been on duty?

A: I was on duty from the previous night at 6:00 and was scheduled to go off duty at 6 PM on December the 7th.

Q: What was the first indication you had that this wasn't going to be an ordinary Sunday?

A: My first indication... I would say our first indication, because two or three others on duty at that particular time in Kalihi Fire Station were at the rear of the Station, and we noticed lots of "Ack-Ack" smoke. In other words, anti-aircraft smoke bursting over the Pearl Harbor, Hickam [Field] complex. And we were amazed at the amount of smoke caused by this "Ack-Ack". Of course we all knew what "Ack-Ack" smoke looked like and we were all amazed and we were all waiting for something to happen, or some call to come in. Because it was our first run to Hickam, we had been there before and we knew what the situation was down there through preplanning with the Federal people for fire prevention purposes. We were excited about it and we were anticipating something. That was the first indication.

Q: Did you get a call at the Station to go down to Hickam?

A: I'd say in a few minutes, the main telephone rang and it was answered by Lt. [Fredrick] "Fred" Kealoha on duty. Fred hit the gong. Now in most cases we don't know where we're going, but Fred hit the gong. Everybody responded. The engineer started his vehicle, the hose wagon driver (we were a two-piece Company at that particular time) started his vehicle. And Fred mentioned the fact that we're going and he pointed toward the direction of where the smoke was coming from and he didn't need to tell us that we were going to the Pearl Harbor, Hickam complex. He just said, "We're going." and we all knew that we were headed down in that area by virtue of the "Ack-Ack" bursts in the air.

Q: About how long did it take you to get down there to Hickam?

A: It took us a little time because we had to follow the old King St.- Moanalua Rd., passing through Moanalua Gardens and then approaching Ft. Shafter. Fort Shafter is located adjacent to the

Moanalua Gardens and then we made a left turn. We did not have to go over Red Hill. We stayed on the Honolulu side of Red Hill - Pearl City, down through the old Moanalua Rd. towards the Hickam Pearl complex because there's nothing along Nimitz Hwy. Nimitz Hwy. did not come into existence until later on. So I would say roughly, it took us all of 8 to 10 minutes, approximately 7 or 8 minutes. It could be as long as 9 minutes to get down there to Pearl.

Q: When you pulled into Hickam, what was the sight that greeted your eyes?

A: As we approached the Main Gate of Hickam, the guard was there, the gate man, and all he was doing was waving us in. And as we approached, heading down the main road of Hickam, of course the hangars are located on the left and the two big barracks were on the right. Coming down that main drag, my first indication of the wreckage was noticing the row of palm trees being sheared off. There were about 15, maybe 20 feet high and most of the branches and some of the trunks were sheared off 4, 5, and 6 feet from the ground. Then we noticed the injured and in some places there were dead because of the mangling of their bodies. The two big barracks on the right were burning in several places. On the left there was an aircraft already on fire, and of course heading down the main drag of Hickam and approaching the fire station there, we noticed that the gasoline was on fire. Also there was the main pipeline... it was bursting from a huge crater.

The Lt. stopped the Company right in front of the Hickam Fire Station and right then and there, there was the Hickam Fire Ranger, I'd say not completely clear of the station... I'd say about half way out. We stopped at the left of the station and the driver was slumped over the wheel of the rig. Now at that particular time we heard planes coming in. Lt. who no doubt had surveyed the damage on the way, (he had a birds eye view because he was riding on the right of the driver and we were hanging on the rear of the truck. So he got a real good view of things going into Hickam Field. After the rig stopped and we heard planes coming in and of course all during this time there was anti-aircraft gunfire there. Not only anti-aircraft gun but it sounded like guns that were smaller than anti-aircraft firing.

So the Lieutenant, got off the truck and we got off the truck and he told us in just a few words, "On your own! Take cover!" and that was the last we saw of the Lt. That was the last I saw of Mr. [Harry t. L.] Pang who was injured. Mr.[William K.] Tam and I proceeded to take cover towards one of the hangars and it could have been towards the ocean side of one of the hangars, but definitely I know the exact location that we took cover was on the town side of the petroleum yard, or the service station yard. And all of this time here, planes were coming in we could barely see the "Rising Sun" insignia on sides of these bombers that were coming in. I noticed one, two... I notices three bombers that were clearly visible by the "Rising Sun" on the side.

Now at this stage here, this is quite some time now. I'm talking about time elapsed of about 20 minutes, 30 minutes. It could be up to 40 minutes that we took cover and of course the other two companies were already there. We found our way around. I don't know what time they came in but it shouldn't be too much of a time elapsed since we got there, because the Palama Station, the second end, was located I'd say about a

mile from the Kalihi Unit. And of course Central is not too far away; perhaps a mile from the Palama Unit. So actually, the 3rd Company to come in is only about 2 miles, a little over 2 miles away from the Kalihi Unit, and giving and taking traffic conditions, why the time of entry would be real close for Palama and Kalihi, and maybe even the Central Company.

Q: Were you able to do any firefighting while you were there?

A: Yes, firefighting we did. And after about 30 or 40 minutes (it may be longer, it may be less) this we found later was after the 3rd attack. See, the first one was still in the Station. This was when we noticed the "Ack-Ack" fire over Hickam/Pearl. You know, shortly after we got there, the second attack came on and if you will recall the military attacks on Hickam, that was determined later on. Then after the 3rd attack was over, we did fire fighting work. Of course with the main fire supply line being hit, we engaged our pumping equipment in the bombed out line which created the water hole; took suction there and started the fire fighting operations with, I can recall two of the planes that were burning. Six or seven of us were concentrated in the large barracks. There wasn't too much to burn in the large barracks. There was a lot of kitchen tables and personnel. Because there was solid reinforcement in these buildings. Of course the roof was burning. The sheeting of the roof were wood and I do recall that wooden mess tables were really splintered by those bomb hits. Later on while surveying the damage while conditions were brought a little under control, we surveyed the kitchen area and the way those mess tables were shattered, no doubt about it the main barracks received direct bomb hits.

So we fought fires there at Hickam all the way through December 7th and didn't get back to quarters until the evening of December the 8th, 1941.

Q: What was your feeling inside while the attack was going on?

A: My feeling while the attack was going on, at least from the time we got there, while we were going through that second attack, was that they got us... you know, they got us. The destruction was so widespread, as we approached the area. Now if one attack could do that, we knew that they were coming in again. We figured by golly they got us. This is our end. But we survived. We were very fortunate to survive that attack and we survived the next. But I surmise that if the Lt. didn't tell us to take cover. I think we would have been open targets out there for the balance of the second attack anyway; perhaps the third attack. Because there was one... two men, there were two men... only about two men in the crew that the Lt.... well there were about one, two, three, or four men that were experienced. Pang who passed away had about four years experience, I had about 8 months, [William K.] "Bill" Tam who was with me, had about 4 months of service. So we were raw recruits and actually we needed guidance; not only guidance but we needed immediate direction by the Officer, and this we got from Fred Kealoha. And when he mentioned you're on your own and take cover under those conditions, it registers right away (laughter)... no matter how much.... no experience one has.

Q: In looking back on all this, what's the one memory, the one sight, or the one incident that stands out the most in your mind?

A: The one incident today is the total destruction that we approached Hickam in the initial run in... total destruction there. The barracks were hit, the airplanes, the hangars, the palm trees. It was a beautiful place. It was beautifully landscaped coming down that main drag, with well kept roads, sidewalks, and royal palm trees. Now these royal palm trees really made an impression on me because they signified when I was a kid, the old plantation towns, that were all lined with royal palms. And the plantation manager had beautiful homes within those complexes, on the plantations from Waimanalo, Wailua, Kahuku, Ewa.... you name it; there were about 10 plantations on this Island at that particular time. And they signified a thing of beauty and Hickam actually took that landscaping, the landscaping architect for Hickam, took that landscaping from the plantations that we had here on the Island of Oahu. So the total destruction when we were coming in, the buildings, the landscaping, and the dead and injured that we saw; and then would be planes coming over on top that were easily identified.

Q: Is there anything else you can think of to add?

A: Well, I always did say, this is of course this is quarterbacking again, if it could be that over again, the best thing to do in such cases, the best thing to do is withdraw, of course with enough personnel to take care of the injured and the dying, and then when it's all over, come back in. Because actually the engagements that we had down there after the attack didn't do any good because everything had been destroyed; everything had to be repaired. There's nothing we could save in an airplane. Once an airplane started to burn it was gone. Once it was hit and in the process of burning, it was gone. And most of the debris there that was burning was a total loss anyway. I don't recall how many more lives were lost during that second attack. Of course the initial attack is something else, but I think once the disaster or the source of the disaster is known, and the disaster can be early evaluated, I think the best thing that could have been done would be withdraw the forces with of course enough personnel to take care of the injured and the dead and then come back in when it's all over. Because there was no exposures. It was hit period. The targets were there. The targets were hit. Evidently the enemy knew where the targets were directed on the water line, directed on the gas line, directed on the fire station, hits on the hangars, hits on the barracks. Of course the single story duplexes in Hickam along the Pearl Harbor water line there were not too severely damaged. In other words, the enemy knew what they needed to do and they did it. And I think we lost quite a few men during that second and final attack.

Q: OK, thank you.

A: (laughter)