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RETURN TO

AFSHRC

MAXWELL AFB AL 36112

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2004

AFSHRC
MAXWELL AFB AL 36112

RETURN TO

80-FI-19-SA-PS
11/11/24-
11/12/08

MY DAY, DECEMBER 7th

On November 29th, 1941 at Wheeler Field, Hawaii final preparations were being made by the 6th and 19th Fighter Squadrons of the Army Air Corps for departure by air craft carriers for stations in Midway and Wake Islands. The date of departure from Pearl Harbor was set as December 1, 1941.

At that time I was a Staff Sergeant serving as a Flight Chief in the 19th Fighter Squadron. Both the 6th and 19th Squadrons were full strength in personnel, planes and equipment. Our planes being P-40's, at that time the best in the world.

Saturday morning, November 29th, was devoted to preparing personal equipment for movement. Full field packs to be rolled, tin hats and various other items to be drawn from the Supply Sergeant by soldiers preparing for war. All our planes were on the ramps fully equipped, to include machine guns loaded. All that was necessary to fire a burst was to turn the charging cable a quarter turn to the left, which would place ammunition in the gun chamber and then press the trigger.

Excitement was high, the men of the other eight squadrons at Wheeler Field envied us. We expected the

* 25 planes per sqdn

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Japanese to attack the Philippines but not Hawaii, and for some reason not known to us our departure date was changed to December 8, 1941. Perhaps the entire course of the war with Japan would have been altered if our two squadrons had departed on December 1.

The delay was a great disappointment to us as we felt that perhaps our orders would be cancelled, thereby depriving us of getting closer to the Philippines and possible battle. The week wore on as the day of infamy crept closer and we waited impatiently to move.

On Saturday, December 6th, Lieut. Ahola, my flight leader, had flown his plane to Pearl Harbor where it was placed aboard a Carrier so that he could practice a take-off to determine the degree of flaps to use. ^(20°) When he returned to the field I decided to place his plane in the hanger for final landing gear check, prior to departure on Monday morning. The hanger was completely empty so Lieut. Ahola's plane was placed facing out towards the field.

During the past few months we had been on continual alert and ready to fight, our planes dispersed around the field, however our ^X alert status had changed to protect against sabotage. All planes at Wheeler Field, about 300

X changed by President's order,

of all types, were lined up on the ramps, wing tip to wing tip and tail to tail, so as to present as small an area as possible to guard against any possible sabotage. The 45th Fighter Squadron was on temporary duty for gunnery practice at Kawaialoa Field about 15 miles away. The Infantry and Artillery were already deployed along the beaches ready for action as they had been for the past six months. The weekend weather was perfect, spirits were again high awaiting December 8th, Monday, and our departure.

Sunday, December 7th, 1941, started out a beautiful and peaceful day for me. Having finished breakfast with a few other Sergeants I went outside to the road in front of my barracks and waited for the arrival of the paper boy, along with ^{HAROLD J. TOMAH, WISC.} Sergeant Moore, and several other early birds. I looked at the beautiful cool Koolau mountain range, turned and looked towards Pearl Harbor, over the pineapple fields and at our planes lined up on the ramp. It was wonderful to be alive, so good to be a soldier in Hawaii with exciting days ahead.

My thoughts were interrupted by the sound of planes coming through Kole Kole Pass. ^{*} There were three two engined land planes somewhat resembling our own A-20's, an attack bomber. They were painted O D color and as they approached

** AT THIS TIME NO ONE IN AMERICA BELIEVED 2 ENGINED BOMBERS COULD TAKE OFF FROM AN AIRCRAFT CARRIER.*

opposite our field they cleared their machine guns by firing short bursts and continued towards Pearl Harbor. There were no identifying markings on the planes, and as they came abreast of the field our anti-air craft protection located around the field opened fire with 50 caliber machine guns. I don't know to this day how they knew the three planes were Japanese or why they opened fire as no attack had as yet taken place.

I felt apprehensive but suggested to the group that we go on the ramp and watch what I thought was practice firing. At this time our attention was attracted above us to a squadron of silver planes which were peeling off singly and diving very slowly towards us. I looked towards Pearl Harbor and could see no planes in the air except the three that had come through Kole Kole Pass and had headed in that direction. As I looked back to the planes diving at us, the rising sun painted on the wings became visible.

Several comments were made that the Navy was certainly conducting realistic exercises. When the leading plane released two one-hundred pound bombs, I could see that they were headed for the dump at the end of the hanger line. I just couldn't believe the Navy would drop practice bombs in that area and my heart beat faster as I watched the bombs drop.

When they hit the Engineering Hanger, the last on the line all my doubts vanished and with heart beating furiously I ran into the barracks, up the second floor stairs, all the while shouting, "Its war men, get to the Hangers", my thought being to get to the hanger as I felt sure some of the pilots would do the same and that should be our rightful place of duty.

Men first sat up in their bunks unbelieving. I then ran into my room off the rear porch which I shared with Staff Sergeant M. A. Crawford from Texas. Crawford was shaving, I didn't say a word, but reached under my bunk, pulled out my pack with tin hat attached. I couldn't unfasten the helmet so ran out of the room carrying the pack and tin hat and attempting to unfasten the hat as I ran.

None of the men had as yet reached the stairway and my plan was to get the tin hat on, crawl to the hanger by using the gutter which was about 12 inches deep and get Lieut. ^{Gas} Ahola's plane warmed up and open the hanger doors. The plane could take off directly to the front between the parked planes. As I reached the main floor I noticed a tin hat lying on the hallway floor, how it got there I never found out. I dropped my pack and put on the tin hat, at the

same time I was mentally keeping track of the planes attacking us. They were diving between two rows of barracks with the rear machine gunner spraying the barracks to keep personnel away from the planes. At the time I was picking up the tin hat, 3 planes had passed us, the first plane dropping two bombs and machine gunning. The second dropped no bombs, but machine gunned and the third passed machine gunning. I didn't think the third plane dropped any bombs so figured I could continue running to the street, hit the gutter and crawl along it to the hanger.

As I left the shelter of the porch I was looking to my right front and saw Sergeant Guthrie from North Carolina running in the center of the street about twenty yards from me. I got out about five yards from the porch when a bomb hit just about where Sergeant Guthrie^x was. I didn't hear it, but saw the tree between the bomb and me turn gray and shake. I thought the bomb hit in the tree.

When I regained consciousness I was lying on my stomach and facing toward the barracks, looking at my tin hat with the top cut off. I remember thinking that I must get under cover and getting up on my hands and knees. I then became unconscious for the second time and it was during this period that Sergeant Malakowski pulled me into the porch. I got up

* Determined later.

from the floor while still unconscious and came to just as I was opening the screen door. I did not know then that I had been unconscious a second time. I went to the stairway where the men were lined up to the top floor. I was covered with blood and ^{Sgt Guthrie's intestines,} several men fainted when they saw me. Sergeant S. M. Rackowski of Pennsylvania was at the foot of the stairs and I instructed him to get the men down on the ground floor, which he did. After the attack was in progress about fifteen minutes we had several men wounded. Sergeants Malakowski, Rackowski, and ^{Roy H. San Bernardino Calif.} Morgan cleared a space for the wounded and provided first aid, there was no panic and everyone waited for the attack to subside.

My wounds consisted of bomb fragments in the left forearm, and left thigh, cement, sticks, stones and other debris embedded over my entire right side and ruptured blood vessels in my lungs. While Sergeant Malakowski administered first aid to me I attempted to get the men to go to the hanger, thinking that a pilot might have made it to the hanger and would need help to get a plane into the air.

Staff Sergeant Paul Cipreano restrained the men from going to the hanger at this time, and rightly so, due to the entire attacking force concentrating its efforts on the hanger

line. Paul said the hanger line and all planes appeared to be on fire and that the Japanese were using twenty millimeter cannon to do the job. As it turned out later, Captain Morris and Lieut. Ahola did make it to the hanger but couldn't have taken Lieut. Ahola's plane up as the hanger was under continual heavy enemy fire.

I wondered if the Japanese had landed on our beaches and where the Navy and Marine planes were, everyone was asking the same questions, hoping and praying for the Navy planes to appear, just as the Navy was asking for the Army planes.

Wheeler Field was under attack three times during a period of about fifty minutes. After the enemy planes completed their mission the wounded were assembled on the ground behind the dispensary awaiting transportation to Schofield Barracks Station Hospital. Due to the large number of casualties the hospital staff worked until well after midnight. In my ward we were taken to the operating table on a porch in the order of our arrival, and as a consequence I waited fourteen hours to get my wounds attended to and there were two more men after me.

The casualties suffered were high as was the property damage. Out of all the P-40's at Wheeler Field it took an entire week to assemble seven planes from the salvaged parts of destroyed planes.

Initially when we were under attack, I did not see any planes over Pearl Harbor, which leads me to believe that probably Sergeant Guthrie was the first American killed in World War II, and I the first wounded. I have often wondered what course the war with Japan would have taken if our movement to Wake and Midway Islands had proceeded as originally scheduled and we had departed from Pearl Harbor on December 1st. We probably would have ^{TUN}~~pen~~ into the attacking fleet. Our fighter planes were equipped with bomb racks, perhaps we would not have inflicted much damage, but the defenses of Hawaii would have been alerted to stop the infamous attack.

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