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William Shiflette  
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Oral History Collection

William Shiflette

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing William Shiflette for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on March 18, 1976, in Dallas, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Shiflette in order to get his reminiscences, experiences, and impressions while he was at Wheeler Field in the 6th Pursuit Squadron during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Shiflette, just to correct the record here after my introduction, why don't you tell me precisely what your unit was at the time that you were at Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Shiflette: Headquarter and Headquarters Squadron, 18th Pursuit Group.

Dr. Marcello: Now from that point, I have some general questions that I need to ask you before we actually get you to Pearl Harbor. First of all, why don't you give me a brief biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

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Shiflette: I was born in Rochelle, Virginia. It's a Cajun town. In other words, Cajuns were in Virginia before they got to Louisiana. I was born on November 30, 1918, in Madison County. I finished high school in Madison, Virginia, and went to the University of Virginia and graduated there in 1939. I was on my way to the University of Georgia Graduate School of Electrical Engineering when in July, 1939, I got "greetings" for one year. I was called to active duty.

Marcello: In other words, you were drafted.

Shiflette: No, I wasn't drafted. I had belonged to the old Citizens Military Training Corps, which was the fore-runner of the ROTC, and I was in what was called-- considered at that time--the Regular Army Reserve, and I got my "greetings" for one-year tour of duty beginning September 9, 1939, at Richmond, Virginia.

Marcello: What sort of a reaction did you have when you were called to duty?

Shiflette: Well, my family had always been military men anyway. My grandfather in the Spanish-American War was a major, and my father was a lieutenant in World War I, and my uncle was a major, and so it was sort of born in the family.

Marcello: So you were to report to Richmond, Virginia.

Shiflette: Right.

Marcello: What happened at that point?

Shiflette: Well, I was given the physical exam, sworn in, and sent to Brooklyn Army Base in New York, awaiting for transportation to Hawaii.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of going to Hawaii?

Shiflette: Oh, I was young, full of vigor, you know, romance, adventure; so it was alright.

Marcello: I would assume that Hawaii was considered very good duty at that particular time?

Shiflette: Right, it was. It was the epitome of duty.

Marcello: Up to this point, had you really had any serious basic training or anything of that nature yet?

Shiflette: No, not other than the routine two weeks during the summer with the Citizens Military Training Corps at Fort George Meade, Maryland. That's all.

Marcello: In other words, whatever basic training you were going to receive, you were going to receive after you got to your duty station?

Shiflette: Right.

Marcello: So pick up the story from this point. So from Brooklyn you eventually made your way to Hawaii.

Shiflette: All the way around the Canal Zone and then to Hawaii by boat.

Marcello: Where did you go when you got to Hawaii?

Shiflette: Well, I was sent immediately . . . I disembarked there, and was sent right straight to Wheeler Field, Hawaii.

Marcello: Let me ask you a memory tester at this stage. Describe what Wheeler Field looked like at that time as best you can remember in terms of the facilities and barracks and things of that nature.

Shiflette: Well, of course, headquarters set by itself off up on the hill from the main barracks, and along the flight line there was the . . . four . . . five hangars, I believe, five hangars. There was the 19th Pursuit and then the 6th, and then there was one building used for technical school and so forth and another building for engineering and another one for quartermaster. I believe on an east-west direction on the island--I'm not positive about the directions anymore--but anyway, we had a cement runway . . . one runway running east and west, and the rest of it was grass. And then there were three main barracks and then one large barracks called the 18th Air Base Group, and then, of course, there was headquarters, and then towards Shofield Barracks were all the enlisted, noncom quarters and the officers' quarters. You want me to continue with the period prior to December 7?

Marcello: Yes, I'm not to Pearl Harbor yet.

Shiflette: We had been the whole Hawaiian Department, that is, the Army . . . and, of course, the Air Corps at that time was part of the Army and was an outgrowth of the Signal Corps--Air Service and the Signal Corps.

But anyway, we had been on an alert and a maneuver prior to that time. I remember walking around the field with an old stovepipe on my back imitating a tank and field artillery piece, and we pulled guard with broomsticks and things of that sort, you know. That's how funny it was.

Marcello: Let's just go back even farther than that because I do have some more general questions I want to ask you at this point. At the time that you got to the Hawaiian Islands, how much thought did you give to the possibility of war with the Japanese? Now obviously, the war clouds were already gathering in Europe, but how about the Japanese?

Shiflette: Well, at the time the Japanese were making some rumblings and some moves. They had moved into Manchuria, I believe, which is now Korea, and southern and northern Korea, and in through there, and that was controlled by Japan. And they had made some rumblings. As far as war with Japan in the Pacific, that was the farthest from my thoughts. I had known at that particular time that the United States was making moves from some of the older service personnel. We were drawing them out of Japan in '39, and the Philippines, and sending them back to the States and making cadre teams out of them. I thought something was afoot at that point, but as far as the Pacific, no. We had no idea.

Marcello: How safe did you feel on the Hawaiian Islands, that is, in case there were ever any sort of a war with the Japanese? How safe and secure did you feel here at the Hawaiian Islands?

Shiflette: Well, all my training had been in the intelligence department and the operations department, so I knew a little bit more about what was going on than the general GI did, and I felt pretty secure from reading intelligence notes and things of that sort.

Marcello: What made you feel secure there? In other words, what was it about the intelligence information . . .

Shiflette: Distance. Distance, really.

Marcello: In other words, so far as you were concerned, the possibility of Japan or any other enemy moving a fleet all the way across the Pacific about 3,500 miles was virtually nil?

Shiflette: It was almost an impossible task because the patrol of the Navy was supposed to have been so great.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about your particular activities at Wheeler Field. Now at one point or another, you must have gotten into the Army Air Corps. Is that correct?

Shiflette: Right.

Marcello: How did this take place?

Shiflette: I had known an officer through an acquaintance at one time in Washington, D. C., when I worked in the Congress



as a page, and I happened to run into a senator at that particular time. And his son happened to be a graduate of West Point and was at Richmond, Virginia, in the recruiting section when I went there to take my physical and oath. And he assigned me to the Air Corps.

Marcello: Why did you want to get into the Air Corps?

Shiflette: I don't know. I guess it was because sometime prior to that I had made application for flight or cadet training and missed out on the physical.

Marcello: When you got to Wheeler Field, what sort of training did you personally undergo there? Now we mentioned awhile ago that you'd really never had any formal basic training or anything of this nature. What sort of training, what sort of work, did you do here at Wheeler Field?

Shiflette: Well, the first thing in the morning when we first got there, which was around . . . I think it was November of 1939. We left Brooklyn in October, Brooklyn Army Base, and got there in November. And the first thing in the mornings for the first four hours, we'd take drill and small arms practice and things of that sort. And then in the afternoon, we'd be assigned duties in the squadron, maybe in the supply room or out on the hangar line or maybe doing some paperwork or clerical work in the headquarters. And I was sent to do paperwork in the headquarters because I had a college education, I guess. That's the only reason.

- Marcello: So after your general basic training was over, then what sort of specialty did you get into?
- Shiflette: Oh, they sent me to radio school, and they sent me to intelligence school down at the Hawaiian Department at Fort Shafter, and clerical school and then navigation school. And the reason for the navigation school was because at that time the 1st Lieutenant Kenneth P. Bergquist was working on what is now known as the Pursuit Dispersal System.
- Marcello: Well, it sounds like you've had quite a variety of training here. What was the purpose of this? Was this a normal sort of thing to acquaint a person with all these different areas?
- Shiflette: No, I don't think so. It was because I happened to know somebody that . . . I was in the right spot, I guess, at the right time. I don't know.
- Marcello: Well, where did you ultimately end up, then?
- Shiflette: I ultimately ended up as an instructor at Greenville, South Carolina, at the end of the war.
- Marcello: No, no, I mean where did you ultimately end up after you got to Pearl Harbor or to Wheeler Field? In other words, you were working in all these various jobs and so on. What did you ultimately do? Did they finally find a spot for you?
- Shiflette: Well, I was finally made a technical observer and placed in charge of the whole entire Pacific and the Air Warning System.

Marcello: Describe this. How exactly did this work?

Shiflette: Oh, the Air Warning System was the forerunner of the Dispersal System that England used with Bomber Command, Bomber Control, and so forth. We had a map of the whole islands, and communications scattered all over the islands--things of this sort. Now our intelligence posts . . . we read intelligence reports from people on the street, you know, officials and all of that sort of thing. And we decided . . . we planned our strategy and mapped our strategy from this intelligence, and we dispersed the units according to the intelligence that came in--Navy, Marines, Army, and Air Corps.

Marcello: What sort of intelligence were you receiving at this time?

Shiflette: Well, we were receiving intelligence from the Philippines, Australia, through the South Pacific, and from all the regular U. S. intelligence sources.

Marcello: What sort of security clearance did this job have?

Shiflette: Well, at that particular time, it was top secret by the Army, and it eventually ended into the Q clearance.

Marcello: Q clearance?

Shiflette: Q clearance.

Marcello: What is Q clearance?

Shiflette: Well, I don't know what the Q stands for. It's just an abbreviation they had for the CIA and all that sort of stuff.

Marcello: Since you were in intelligence here at Wheeler Field, did you know anything about Magic, for example? Do you know what I am referring to?

Shiflette: No, I don't know what you're referring to.

Marcello: Well, sometime around this particular period, the cryptographers had cracked the Japanese code.

Shiflette: Oh, I know what you're talking about. The name given to it was Magic. Now I know what you're talking about now.

Marcello: Did you have any knowledge of Magic, or were you privy to any of the Magic messages?

Shiflette: I wasn't privy to any of the Magic messages per se, but as a collection from those messages, yes.

Marcello: What sort of conclusions and deductions were you arriving at on the basis of the intelligence that was coming in to your particular unit?

Shiflette: Well, of course, when I first got there, Claire Chennault was commanding officer of the 6th Pursuit Squadron. Then he and several others left for Karachi, India, and went into China at that time for the old Flying Tiger deal eventually. And we knew that something was coming off then, but we didn't know exactly what. At that time at Wheeler Field, especially that I know of, we were not privy to any overall secret of what was developing, you know, from the War Department.

So from that time, about 1940, late '40 or '41, we knew something was going on with the Japanese expansion in the Pacific. Then my thinking was that something was going to happen, but I didn't expect it to happen in Hawaii.

Marcello: And was this the general thinking of everybody else?

Shiflette: Right.

Marcello: In other words, all of the intelligence that was coming to you did not indicate that there was going to be an attack at Pearl Harbor?

Shiflette: Immediately, no. None whatsoever.

Marcello: You knew that the Japanese were up to something and that they were going to do something, but you didn't know where.

Shiflette: Right. The calculation was we were suspecting that . . . when our Navy or submarine fleet out of Philippines had lost contact with the Japanese fleet, we thought that they were going into the Dutch Harbor area of Alaska and make a footing there.

Marcello: How closely was your intelligence unit keeping track of that Japanese fleet, or were you receiving most of this information from the Navy?

Shiflette: Most of it was from the Navy, yes.

Marcello: At that particular time, how much of a threat were the Japanese on the Hawaiian Islands considered to be?

Shiflette: Well, quite a few of them were under surveillance, but they had the wrong ones under surveillance. For instance, at the end of our runway there had lived an old Japanese man there, and he appeared to be in his late fifties or sixties, somewhere along in there, and he had a patch at the end which was a garden, what we call a truck farming garden, sort of deal now. And he had lived there for years, and nobody suspected him--at least ten or fifteen years. The day of Pearl Harbor, the day of the attack at Wheeler Field, somebody happened to think about him down at the end of the runway. They went down there to see because the first bomb that was dropped was dropped at the maintenance hangar, just about 150 feet from where he lived in a little old shack and so forth. They went down there and found buried in the ground a minute and elaborate communications system, and it turned out that he had at one time been in the Japanese Navy and was a member of . . . was a Japanese national. So the Japanese intelligence was, I think, pretty good and accurate in Hawaii, but we had the wrong ones under surveillance.

Marcello: Now being in an intelligence unit, how were the capabilities of the Japanese Navy and Army assessed? In other words, how were the Japanese rated as a fighting force?

Shiflette: I don't remember. In fact, I don't remember hearing too much talk about that around headquarters. We never discussed it that I can remember, and I never saw anything in intelligence that even alluded to that.

Marcello: What were these sources of intelligence information that were coming in? In other words, where were the intelligence coming from?

Shiflette: Well, we were getting it at Wheeler Field from Fort Shafter primarily and the Hawaiian Air Force.

Marcello: But breaking it down into more specific categories than that . . .

Shiflette: We were getting summaries. We were getting summaries.

Marcello: But again, where were they getting the information? From radio intercepts or observation or . . . or just exactly where was the sources of their information?

Shiflette: Part of it was coming out of Washington, part of it in the Philippines at the particular time, and the Navy . . .

Marcello: Where did you live while you were here at Wheeler Field? Did you live right on the base?

Shiflette: I lived on the base, right. In the 6th Pursuit Squadron, upstairs.

Marcello: How far was Wheeler Field from Honolulu?

Shiflette: I don't remember, but it was about ten or twelve miles, something like that.

Marcello: Did you get to go into Honolulu very often?

- Shiflette: Oh, yes, about every weekend, sometimes during the week. It used to be over there, before we went on the alert in '41, that we went to work at eight o'clock in the morning and got off at noon, and we had the rest of the day off.
- Marcello: In other words, it was virtually tropical working hours.
- Shiflette: Nothing on Saturdays and Sundays, right.
- Marcello: And this was the routine right up until the time of that alert in 1941.
- Shiflette: That wasn't only with the Air Corps. That was with the infantry and the artillery at Schofield Barracks and the Navy and the whole bunch.
- Marcello: What did a young soldier do when he had liberty on a weekend during this particular period? What did you usually do?
- Shiflette: What did I usually do? I went to the University of Hawaii some in the afternoons, about three days a week, taking economics and stuff of that sort.
- Marcello: How about on the weekends? What did you usually do on the weekends when you had liberty?
- Shiflette: Oh, I don't know. We went swimming a lot. I read a lot.
- Marcello: What was the pay like at that particular time?
- Shiflette: Twenty-one bucks a month (laughter).



Marcello: That was what a private was getting?

Shiflette: That's right.

Marcello: What was your rank?

Shiflette: At that particular time when Pearl Harbor started, I was a staff sergeant.

Marcello: So you were making a little bit more money, at least, than the \$21 per month?

Shiflette: Right.

Marcello: How often was payday during this period?

Shiflette: Once a month.

Marcello: When does this occur? At the beginning or the end of the month?

Shiflette: Beginning of the month.

Marcello: Beginning of the month. In other words, at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, you would have had a certain amount of money at that time?

Shiflette: Right.

Marcello: What I am leading up to is this, and I think it's something that we need to get straight in the record. A lot of people say that the best time that the Japanese could have ever picked for a surprise attack would have been on a Sunday morning. The assumption is that most of the military personnel on a Sunday morning would be fighting a hangover and this sort of thing from some sort of a wild night on Saturday. In

general, what would be the condition of the men when they would come in from liberty, let's say, on a Saturday night? Now you would probably have to generalize here from your own observations.

Shiflette: From my own observations, the Army and the Air Corps at that particular time and the Army forces were permanent party personnel on the island, and you didn't see as much partying on the weekends from those sources as you did from the Navy. The Navy were bundled up and holed up on ships, and they came into shore for liberty for maybe a week or two weeks at a time, and then they were back out. That's where most of the observation came from--that if they were going to hit, it would be on the weekend because that's when the Navy boys had the run of the town. The Army and Air Corps boys stayed away when the Navy was in port. They stayed out of Honolulu, frankly--the great majority of them.

Marcello: That's an interesting observation, and I think it is an important one to get into the record. Let's go back and talk a little bit more about Wheeler Field. Now what sort of security measures or precautions were being taken at Wheeler Field in case that war did break out between the United States and Japan?

Shiflette: Well, at that particular time, as I see in our particular message center or control center, up until that

Saturday and Sunday we had had dawn and dusk patrols every day, and, of course, the Navy patrolled also a 250 to 500-mile perimeter. At that particular time the Navy was out on maneuvers in the southeast part of the Pacific, I think. That Saturday before we had come off of maneuvers . . . we were still on the alert. We'd come off maneuvers, and we did not have a dawn patrol.

I think General Davidson was in the CG at the time, and we had a general review--everybody in uniform passing review. And that Friday, we lined all the planes up tail-to-tail, up and down the ramp. Tail-to-tail, now mind you! And we had a general review on Saturday morning, awarding promotions and transfers and all that sort of thing.

Marcello: Was this unusual to line those planes up in that particular manner?

Shiflette: Yes, it was. It hadn't been done . . . I think it had been done one time before in the last two years or so.

Marcello: I think that this had become rather standard procedure at Hickam Field.

Shiflette: Right. It had at Hickam because of the space involved, and also John Rogers Airport being adjoining it.

Marcello: I think also it was believed that it would be easier to guard those planes in case any sabotage or anything

of that nature. In other words, it is much easier to guard planes if they are all in nice neat rows than it is if they're scattered all over the field. Of course, with the benefit of hindsight, we know that they ultimately made pretty good targets for the Japanese, also.

This, I think, will conclude most of the general questions that I have, so at this stage let's talk about the events immediately prior to the actual Japanese attack itself. From time to time in our interview, you have mentioned the alert. Just pick up the story from that point. Talk about the alert--when it occurred, why it was called, and that sort of thing.

Shiflette: Well, of course, we were on an alert which was called, I think, at that time an anti-sabotage alert. That's why the planes were lined up tail-to-tail primarily, I believe.

Marcello: When did this alert occur? In other words, when did it start?

Shiflette: I don't know specifically, but I think it was a week or ten days before . . . it was the latter part of November, shortly after Thanksgiving, I believe.

Marcello: What did you do personally when this alert was called?

Shiflette: Well, we established a twenty-four-hour watch at the control center with three shifts and personnel attending

to it at that particular time. I was the NCO in charge of it at that particular time, and Lieutenant Van Deman Browne was the officer in charge. He was a 1st lieutenant from Waycross, Georgia, I believe, He was called to active duty for a year's period, too, and we kept getting extensions every six months until the war caught us. I don't know why we let go on that particular Saturday other than that general review, and people just didn't get caught up again afterwards. I don't know why, but . . .

Marcello: How seriously was this alert being taken?

Shiflette: I think within a handful of people it was being taken very, very seriously, and the impact of it was not, or had not, and was not, filtered down into the important lower echelons as it should have been.

Marcello: How about you yourself? How seriously were you taking the alert?

Shiflette: Well, I was taking it as seriously as it was imposed upon me at that particular time by Captain Bergquist and Lieutenant Browne, and we were maintaining our watch and so forth.

Marcello: Now by this time intelligence had definitely indicated that the Japanese were up to something. Is that correct?

Shiflette: Right. Right. We were expecting them to hit the Philippines or take the Philippines because it was the

most vulnerable. We had shipped some of our old planes from Hawaii--from Wheeler Field--to Clark Field and so forth.

Marcello: Let me ask you this question, and it's more or less a general one. What sort of a liaison was there between Army intelligence and Navy intelligence in the Hawaiian Islands at this particular time?

Shiflette: Now I can't elaborate on the higher echelons between General Short and so forth, but if it was indicative between us from Wheeler Field and the Marines down at Barbers Point and so forth, and at Fort Island, there was practically none.

Marcello: In other words . . .

Shiflette: Except we did have in the control room telephone lines to those places, so we could disperse the Marines and the Navy that were on the ground.

Marcello: In other words, the right arm really didn't know what the left arm was doing, so to speak?

Shiflette: No, no.

Marcello: Army intelligence and Navy intelligence were more or less working in vacuums. They were each going their own separate way.

Shiflette: Right.

Marcello: What sort of messages would you be receiving from the Navy? In other words, I've seen it written that most

of the important Magic intercepts that went from Washington to the Hawaiian Islands normally were sent via Naval communications because for some reason it was thought that Naval communications were more secure than Army communications. Do you know anything about this?

Shiflette: Well, it was sort of generally understood that the senior in command, whether he was Navy or whether he was Army, whether it was General Short or Admiral Kimmel . . . and Kimmel at that particular time out-ranked Short by . . . you know, the niceties of rank. And it was, of course, the old caste system in the service that came out of D. C. because Kimmel was senior in command of Short by date or whatever it was, so things went to the Navy. Also, the Navy was considered more mobile and had more charge of the defense of the islands because of the perimeter of the ships and things of that sort. So it was felt that the Navy was the leader, and that's one of the old caste systems and explains why it was filtered down to the Navy, even though they both had their separate commands and operated entirely separate from each other.

Marcello: But nevertheless, your intelligence people, that is, those on your level, never got together with your Naval counterparts and discussed joint intelligence and things of that nature.

Shiflette: Not on an official basis, no.

Marcello: As you look back on it, do you think that this was a mistake?

Shiflette: It was a mistake.

Marcello: What do you think you could have possibly surmised had you been able to maintain some sort of communications with the Naval intelligence?

Shiflette: Well, I think that if at that particular time Captain Bergquist had gotten his hands on intelligence that he should have been getting or should have gotten, I think that something would have been done because that man was brilliant. He was smart; he was on his toes; and he kept everybody under him and subordinates to him informed what was going on as much as he knew.

Marcello: Let me ask you another question, then. Why was it that there wasn't a liaison between the two branches of the service? Was it that each of you considered the other very professional and knew what he was doing, and assumed--and I think that "assumed" is a big word here--that the other was doing his job and that sort of thing?

Shiflette: Right. We had no suspect of the other.

Marcello: Let's get back again to the alert. Now the alert had been called approximately ten days prior to the actual Japanese attack, and the alert was actually still on



. . . or I guess it was called off that Saturday morning, was it not, when you had the inspection?

Shiflette: I don't think it was called off. It was just, you know, just wasn't paid attention to.

Marcello: Pick up the story from this point then, that is, from the time of the inspection on Saturday morning.

Shiflette: From the inception of the inspection Saturday morning?

Marcello: Right. Right.

Shiflette: Well, we had the review, and I believe I was color guard that Saturday. I'm not positive, but I think I was. Anyway, we all dismissed, and from then on, I don't know what happened. Nobody went back to the post, I think. Most of the people went off. We did have the watch or the OD supposedly, and his post was at headquarters, at the Headquarters 18th Pursuit Group.

Oh, and prior to that time, we had had another group form at Wheeler Field--the 14th Pursuit Group--and this made up the 14th Pursuit Wing, I think it was, at that time. We became part of the wing, and from the administrative standpoint and function standpoint, this hadn't been going on too long . . . 73rd Squadron and 44th and all that sort of thing. And there was considerable confusion going on between administration, and we weren't settled. Some of them were living in

tents, and the housing and the quartering and the feeding and the administration and all was sort of confused at Wheeler Field at the time.

Marcello: What did you personally do after the inspection was over?

Shiflette: I don't remember. I don't remember. I really don't.

Marcello: Did you leave the base or go on liberty or anything like that?

Shiflette: No. I don't . . . I had liberty. I think I went . . . that evening, I went over to . . . oh, yes, I do remember, too. That evening, I went over at Kohuku Farms, which was outside the gate of Schofield Barracks. Kohuku Farms is a restaurant. And we had our regular Army Reserve which was at that time about forty or fifty of us with Wheeler Field and Schofield combined, and some of the other places, and we met at 6:30 at Kohuku Farms for dinner and the meeting. I remember we broke up about 9:30 that night. We'd had some drinks and so forth. I came on back because I had to go on duty the next morning at eight o'clock, and I came on back to the barracks and went to sleep.

Marcello: Did you observe anything unusual that night after you got back to the barracks? In other words, was it more or less a routine night?

Shiflette: Just a routine night, yes--nothing different. I remember the Navy had started coming into Pearl Harbor that

weekend, in fact, the Thursday before, and I think the Lexington or something was due back in either that Saturday or Sunday. We all knew from the movement of the Navy to stay out of Honolulu, so nobody that I know of went to Honolulu. Oh, of course, three or four of them, but not in mass like we used to go.

Marcello: Where were your barracks located with regard to the airfield, that is, the runways themselves?

Shiflette: Oh, we were . . . there was just one street between us and the hangars and the runway.

Marcello: Well, I think this is kind of going to be important as we get into the story.

Shiflette: I think it was about 200 yards, 300 yards, something like that.

Marcello: Okay, Saturday then was a rather routine day, I guess we could say. You had the inspection; you ultimately had dinner at this restaurant that was right off the base; you came back relatively early, and you retired.

This brings us to the morning then of December 7, 1941, and what I want you to do is pick up the story at this point and go into as much detail as you remember in describing the events of that particular day--from the time you got up until all hell broke loose.

Shiflette: Okay. Well, I had normally been getting up at 5:30 in the morning. That's from an old practice of growing up

on the farm as a kid--5:30 in the morning. So it had become habit with me, and I automatically woke up. I did my ablutions and went down to breakfast at seven o'clock when the mess hall opened and ate and had gone back upstairs to brush my teeth and get my cap and cigarettes and stuff and go to my post at headquarters at 8:00--be there at 8:00--to relieve Lieutenant Kermit Tyler, who at that particular time was there, and a private who was on the switchboard by the name of McDonald. I can't remember his first name . . . Harold . . . I don't know what his first name was now. McDonald is all I know. He was a private.

Marcello: This brings up an interesting story now. You were to relieve Lieutenant Kermit Tyler, and this was the man who was expecting the B-17's from the West Coast.

Shiflette: Well, we knew they were coming in, but we expected them around nine o'clock or something, you know.

Marcello: Okay, so pick up the story at this point.

Shiflette: So as I had started back down . . . and we were only about two blocks, three blocks from Headquarters, you know. It was just a five-minute walk, three-minute walk, something like that. I had started back down the steps and got to the head of the steps, and I heard this "BOOM," you know, airplanes and all. Suddenly, there was a "BOOM," so I ran out on the sallyporch and

looked . . . and the engineering building was all aflame, and here these planes were going up in smoke.

Somebody said, "Well, the Navy's going to catch hell for this morning," because we knew the Navy was coming back, and we thought, "What the hell is the Navy doing?" Maybe a bomb automatically left their wing or something, you know, accidentally. Another guy said . . . I think it was Strong, John Strong, who said, "Navy, hell! That's the Japs!"

I headed down the steps, and about that time as I got down to the bottom of the steps, a bomb hit the kitchen part of the building where I was in--in the same area. We were in the east area, I think it was, the 18th Pursuit Group headquarters. And I went down to the base at that particular time, and the airplanes were being shot up on the ground and the fire . . . the bombs were bursting and . . . and I happened to walk out on the street toward the hangar, and the boys in the 44th Pursuit Group, which were in tents at that time between two hangars which was up front and catty-cornered on the corner . . . and guts and blood and fire and everything else was going.

There was a guy laying out there in the street. I don't know whether he was hurt or he was scared or what. But anyway, I went out and got his hand to

bring him back to the edge of the building, and as I was bringing him from the street to the edge of the building . . . I felt this weight in my hand, and, of course, he had been hit by shrapnel. I left him there and way trying to make my way up to the headquarters.

Marcello: Let's just go back a minute. You were on the steps of the porch when the first bombs hit, and after you saw that these were Japanese planes and so on, one of the first things that you did was to go out to help this person who . . .

Shiflette: No, I was going out to go to my post because to me that was the thing to do. In time of war you should go to your post, so that's where I was trying to go to report. This was just an interlude in me trying to get to headquarters on the post.

Marcello: Okay, so you came across this guy who evidently was in shell shock or something or other, and you tried to get him into shelter. What happened at this point now?

Shiflette: Well, I went around the edge of the building, and at this time I saw them strafing the 19th Pursuit Group barracks, and guys were out in the street running all over the place just like flies. They were perfect targets for strafing, and they were strafing, too.

So I made my way between the 6th Pursuit building where the bomb had hit and the 18th Air Base barracks

and ran through that trying to get over to the main street to get to headquarters. I thought, well, if I could get past that strafing point and go up the side street and follow the barracks line and tree line, well, they wouldn't see me, and I could get there, you see.

Marcello: Well, when did you come across this guy who was in shock?

Shiflette: When I first went out to the street to go on my way up to the headquarters. It was second nature. I came down the steps, turned left, and went out to go up the street, you know. Rather than going out between the barracks and the grass, you know, you always went out the other way. It was just a habit, I guess, you know, just a habit. I should have gone out the other way, but anyway . . .

Marcello: But again, I want to get back to this man because I don't understand what happened to him.

Shiflette: The kid's name was Byrd, as well as I remember now, that I picked up. His name was Byrd, and he was from Jacksonville, Florida, and he was killed there.

Marcello: In other words, he would have not been hit, though, at the time that you went toward him.

Shiflette: Not that I know of. But when I picked him out of the street, I don't know whether he was shell shocked or what he was, you know.

Marcello: Well, anyhow, you were leading him to safety . . .

Shiflette: To cover.

Marcello: . . . and it was while you were leading him to cover that he was hit by a shrapnel or something of this nature?

Shiflette: Right, right. Or he was shelled, you know, strafed, I guess.

Marcello: In other words, I can surmise, then, that you yourself came pretty close to being shot up at this particular point.

Shiflette: Right.

Marcello: What thoughts were going through your mind when the initial explosions occurred and thing of this nature? What sort of emotions did you feel? Do you recall?

Shiflette: Well, I think I was rather . . . I was cool. I wasn't scared. I don't remember being scared or anything. But I knew that I couldn't go into the 9th Pursuit Squadron and help people there, or the 44th, because that was . . . I was just asking for it there. As I went around the building on the other side to go up to the 18th Air Base, there was a guy laying in the street with his . . . well, not on the street, but right there beside the building, between the building and sidewalk, with his guts in his hand, so I did reach down and pull him back and laid him down and went on



over to the 18th Pursuit Squadron. In the meantime . . . somewhere along the line I had lost my shoe, one of my shoes.

Marcello: And I assume that you have no idea how you lost the shoe?

Shiflette: I had no idea how I lost the shoe. And I finally went over to the 18th Air Base barracks and went up the street. This major came out of the barracks, the new 18th Air Base barracks, material barracks, and told me to get my ass back to my barracks.

Marcello: In other words, you were still trying to get to your post, but this major turned you around and sent you back to your barracks?

Shiflette: Yes. I can't remember who he was now. I don't remember his name.

Marcello: Okay, so what did you do at that point?

Shiflette: Well, I just sort of told him, I said, "I've got to get to my post at headquarters in the basement." And he looked at me, and he says, "Headquarters will probably be blown off! It's a target probably, and you'd better get back to your barracks!" So I said, "Okay."

So I came back down the street then and came back to the old 18th Air Base, past the old 86th Observation Squadron, and I just sort of stood there on the edge of the building and looked to see what in the hell was going on.

And all of a sudden all the planes flew off, you know, no planes at all around, so I made my way back up to the post at headquarters. So there was . . . McDonald was still there, scared to death, and where Kermit Tyler was, I don't know. I never did see him from that time on. Somebody said--this is just strictly hearsay, and I don't know if there is any truth to it--but McDonald said that Tyler had closed at seven o'clock and had gone back upstairs to the operational office where the OD usually sat. And when I got there, which was about 8:30, I guess it was, something like that, he wasn't there, so I don't know.

Marcello: Okay, I gather that while most of the actual bombing and strafing was going on, you had buildings between you and the field. Isn't that correct? In other words, you went behind the buildings obviously because the cover was better there. Describe exactly how the Japanese were attacking. Can you describe the tactics that they used that day? What do you recall about the Japanese planes themselves?

Shiflette: Well, they were usually right well in line. They didn't do a lot of crazy things. They usually came in from what I'd say was the west end and flew in that way. Now how they got there, I don't know. Where they came in to get to that point, I don't know. But they

were flying down . . . they first came in flying down from the west to the east.

Marcello: How low were they?

Shiflette: Just a little bit above the . . . I'd say twenty or thirty feet or fifty feet above the hangar tops, and that's about it.

Marcello: Were the pilots visible?

Shiflette: Yes! You could see them.

Marcello: What did they look like to you? Describe what these Japanese pilots looked like?

Shiflette: Well, you could only see them just about that much (gesture) above the cockpit.

Marcello: In other words, you could just see their head?

Shiflette: Just barely see their head, yes. They had the old type of flight cap, you know, and all that sort of stuff.

Marcello: I've even heard it said that they came in at a rather leisurely pace, in other words.

Shiflette: Yes, they did. There was no . . . now a lot of people say that they hit Pearl Harbor on 0755, which they did, but they hit Wheeler Field three minutes before that. They knocked out all the fighters that they could. They hit us first before they hit Pearl Harbor--just about three minutes ahead of time.

Marcello: Now we think that today there were two waves. Can you remember the two waves and the lull between the two waves?

Shiflette: Yes.

Marcello: What did you do between the lull?

Shiflette: Well, as I was standing between the two barracks looking and . . . I had a good command of the hangars, you know. There is nothing between the old 18th and the 6th Pursuit Squadron, the hangars, nothing in there at all because there was a blank field between the 6th and the 19th, blank block in there. And all of a sudden, they were gone.

All of a sudden I went over and sat down on the street, the curb right opposite the dispensary, took a cigarette--I was smoking Philip Morris at that time--and lighted it and went all to pieces like this, shaking (gesture), and I didn't know what the hell was going on. I guess that's when my fright came out.

Then I finally got up and went over to the supply room--the 6th Pursuit barracks--and got me another shoe and put it on. Then I went up to headquarters.

And then the other flight came in. That particular time, I was . . . and McDonald and . . . at that time Householder, who was a private, had reported, and J. W. Jenkins, who was a corporal, Archie Householder, J. W. Jenkins, and Lee Bailey, who was a pfc. Householder was from New Kensington, Pennsylvania. J. W. Jenkins was from Industrial, West Virginia. Lee Bailey was from

some town in Tennessee, and Hall . . . I can't remember his first name there . . . W. C. or something like that . . . Hall was from the coal mines in Kentucky, at Hazard, Kentucky. J. C. Combs was from Kentucky, also--a tall, lanky guy. They all . . . those that I know of reported for duty and Lieutenant Van Deman Browne finally came in. But when we got there we tried to make contact by phone to all the dispersal areas and couldn't get a soul. Not a soul could we get!

So the other wave came over. We had no warning at Wheeler Field because we didn't have any planes. We had about three or four planes that got up, I think-- Lieutenant Welch, Browne . . . "Hangdog" Browne . . . I don't remember . . . Lieutenant "Hangdog" Browne. I don't remember his first name. Yes, "Hangdog" Browne and Lieutenant Welch, Lieutenant Davis, I believe . . . and there was another officer that got up, too, but I don't remember his name. He was shot down.

Marcello: Well, anyhow, what did you do when the second wave came over then?

Shiflette: There was nothing . . . we just stayed at our post at headquarters, and it was all over, you know. The second wave wasn't . . . it was almost a couple of runs, and that was about it. You know, it wasn't too much to that.

Marcello: I guess by the time the second wave came over there weren't too many targets left, were there?

Shiflette: No. I think they came around to make a reconnaissance photographs. Primarily, that's what they did, frankly.

Marcello: And all this time you did not see Kermit Tyler at all. Is this correct?

Shiflette: No.

Marcello: Do you recall any of the B-17's coming in . . .

Shiflette: Yes.

Marcello: . . . and trying to land? Well, describe what happened here?

Shiflette: Well, one came in . . . and this was strange because I was standing over at the 18th Air Base barracks and looking, and right toward the end of the thing was the B-17 coming in trying to land at Wheeler Field. Evidently, down at Hickam Field at that time was just one helluva mess, you know, and I mean there was no way for them to get in there. Pearl Harbor was such a mess, and Hickam Field itself, and Fort Kamehameha and John Rogers Airport.

I don't guess he could see the runway for the smoke, frankly. So he started coming in, and I don't remember . . . I think there was a couple of passes made at him by the Japs, but he finally got on the ground. No, he didn't either. He didn't. He tried to get on the ground, and he didn't. He took off and they didn't bother him. Now where he went to, I don't remember.

But then there was another one that came after the wave and landed there, and I think the rest of them went somewhere else. I don't know where they went to. We didn't have any communication with them, I know that. They just took it upon themselves to land where they could.

Marcello: In general, how would you describe the reaction and the conduct of the personnel at Wheeler Field during the attack? Was it one of confusion? Panic? Professionalism? How would you describe it?

Shiflette: Well, now with the 44th Squadron in the middle, they were new guys, had just come over there, hadn't been over there too long, and they were, I think, National Guard guys. I'm not sure about that, or reserves. But most of the 14th was made up of reserves and National Guard.

Now the ones that I saw . . . and the old master sergeants, tech sergeants, buck sergeants, and staff sergeants that I saw were real calm about the thing. They knew there was nothing they could do, so they just stood and watched, you know, as best they could, undercover. But afterwards, they went about their routine way of cleaning up, and after the Japs had left after the first wave, they tried to put the fires out with hand extinguishers and everything else they could get their hands on on the flight line. They

tried salvaging right away. Now the younger guys, they stood around, did what they were told to do. But they didn't, you know, advance or take any initiative.

Marcello: What sort of messages were coming into your particular post at this time?

Shiflette: Oh, well, it was about an hour and a half later that some sort of a communications had started again, and we had gotten . . . somebody had started talking on their Hallicrafters. We had a bunch of Hallicrafters set up, and receivers and transmitters and so forth, and we got one report from some station over on Molokai that Molokai was being invaded. Now I don't think that was one of our men that did it. I think this was some Jap who had gotten into the bombing range on Molokai and had gotten to the communications over there in the tower and had put this out himself as to, you know . . . I think it was a Japanese tactic to confuse the people, and we heard reports that they were landing in Midway, which was erroneous, and all kinds of things, you know. It was just enough to scare the hell out of you. You were being invaded.

Marcello: I'm sure in the aftermath of the attack that the base was one big rumor mill.

Shiflette: Oh, yes. Well, that night particularly. We had some Navy flights coming in and some B-17's still to arrive



yet, and we were trying to land them in the dark. We had flashlights with blue covers over them, cellophane. And the guards on duty out there at the bunkers . . . we'd dispersed what planes we had that were salvaged and put them out more or less for decoys than anything else. And the guards on duty were shooting all over the place that night, you know.

Marcello: What did the field look like in the aftermath of the attack? Describe what it looked like to you.

Shiflette: Well, the runway itself was intact. There was nothing done to it. The hangars were bombed and sort of twisted and burned a little bit, particularly Engineering. Now the hangar across from the 6th Pursuit Squadron, I don't believe, was touched at all. The 19th and the 18th on up the line, though, were pretty well hit. Other than the 19th Pursuit Squadron and the 44th in tents in the middle between the . . . what we called the school hangar and the 19th Pursuit Squadron hangar . . . of course all that was all shot up and town up and everything. Then the barracks that I was in, where the kitchen was, was bombed, and we found six guys in the big, old walk-in cooler. We opened the door that afternoon, I guess it was, and here they were sitting around and laying in that just like with their eyes open and ready to speak to us, but, you know, the concussion had killed them.

Marcello: Now did you actually see this?

Shiflette: Yes, I saw that. Yes.

Marcello: You said "we" and I wasn't sure that you were one of the people that had gone into . . .

Shiflette: Well, we had a break, and we were trying to get something to eat, frankly, and that's when we went down there. This great, big, old boy from the 6th Pursuit Squadron . . . I think this name was . . . I don't remember now. He was a mess sergeant.

Marcello: In other words, these guys had gone in the cooler or whatever thinking that it would be safe, and evidently a bomb dropped close enough that the concussion killed them.

Shiflette: Right.

Marcello: What sort of emotions did you have in the aftermath of the attack, that is, after you were able to survey the damage and this sort of thing? Do you recall?

Shiflette: The only one that I remember is after the first wave was gone and I started toward the . . . I don't know why I started toward the 44th or the 19th--because I had some good friends there, I guess--Vincent J. Adducci, a little, short Italian guy, a helluva nice fellow. I think he was a corporal at the time. And Charlie Leyshock and Harold Loose, and Cipriano. I forgot what Cipriano's first name was. Vincent . . .

no, it was Andy, Andy Cipriano, an Italian guy from Brooklyn, New York, a typical Brooklyn guy. I think I started over there to see about them, and then I thought, well, it was just futile going there, so I just turned around and came back and sat down, took out a cigarette and went all to pieces, started shaking.

Marcello: What sort of an attitude did you have toward the Japanese at this time now? Do you recall?

Shiflette: I don't remember. I haven't even thought about it because I remember working for four days straight without any sleep or anything, you know.

Marcello: What sort of an appetite did you have in the aftermath of the attack?

Shiflette: I slept for two days and didn't eat (laughter). I lived on coffee and sandwiches.

Marcello: This was after those four days that you went without any sleep?

Shiflette: Yes. I went down to the new 18th Air Base or material base and went up on one wing up there--I don't know whose bed it was in a room--and I went to sleep and slept, I was told, two days. I don't remember sleeping that long, but I guess I did.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned that after you had gotten to your post, you had tried to contact the units in the field and were unable to do so. What had happened? Do you know why you were unable to contact them?

Shiflette: I think they were busy trying to salvage and, you know, clean up and things of that sort. As I say, the importance of the thing had not been trickled down to where it should have been in the first place--the alert, the importance of the alert.

Marcello: As you look back on that day with the benefit of hindsight, how do you think the Japanese were able to pull it off? How do you explain the Japanese success? I am asking you a highly speculative question.

Shiflette: I know you are. I know you are. Well, I think the way they could pull it off was because of the . . . they had so much communications going. I had read about this afterwards. Some of it was so inconsequential and so insignificant that nobody really realized the importance of it. I think it was a perpetrated thing that they did purposely. Not the fleet itself, you know. It was under a radio silence. But I mean the normal conduct in the course of business and things of that sort--airways and communications going back and forth. I think they purposely did it to cover the movement of the fleet.

Marcello: Okay, Mr. Shiflette, is there anything else that you think we need to get into the record concerning the

Pearl Harbor attack? This more or less exhausts all of my questions. Do you have anything else that you think needs to be a part of the record? I have plenty of tape.

Shiflette: No, I don't know of anything else.