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Interview with  
Paul W. Neff  
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Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello  
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Oral History Collection

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. Paul Neff for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on April 13, 1974, in Fort Worth, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Neff in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was at Hickam Field during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Neff, to begin this interview, would you very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself? In other words, tell me where you were born, when you were born, your occupation--things of that nature. Be very brief and general.

Mr. Neff: I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on May 12, 1911. I attended the William Penn Charter School and later Fishburne Military School in Virginia. My parents were upper middle class, I would say, and these schools I attended were a little expensive in those days. However, the depression hit us early and

I had to leave school and would presume that as of today's language, I was a drop-out. I went to work for the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1929 and stayed about five years. My parents died in the early 1930's, and I was on my own from then. I did various things from being a clerk at the railroad to a salesman. Dunn and Bradstreet was one career, and I ended up on a golf course carrying a bag for a living in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where I met a doctor who more or less helped me get into the service. In October, 1938, I enlisted in the Army, in the Chemical Warfare Service, and went to Edgewood, Maryland. Later, in my first enlistment, I was given a short discharge to re-enlist for the Hawaiian Department and arrived there July 4, 1940.

Marcello: Now going back just a minute, why did you decide to enter the service in the first place?

Neff: Security.

Marcello: I gather it was security or a matter of economics.

Neff: They could have kept the \$21 a month and given me three meals a day and a place to sleep.

Marcello: Now this seems to be one of the common answers that I get from people who enlisted in the service around that time. In many cases, they couldn't find jobs, and

the service was like a fairly good alternative, and, like you mentioned, it did represent a certain amount of security.

Neff: It was, and one of the amazing things was that in my life and time, up until that time, people didn't think of enlisting. My class was to go in as the officer. So I met a varied type of person--the rough type of the old Army and coming in as new personnel arrived, the different types of people, a better education. I went to the Hawaiian Department in the Coast Artillery and later transferred to the Air Corps at Hickam Field.

Marcello: What was the reason for you having re-enlisted in the Army? Was it a matter of wanting that Hawaiian duty?

Neff: Well, I had to because I had less than a year's service to do and the tour in Hawaii was two years. So I had to volunteer for another three-year term in order to make this transfer.

Marcello: I gather that duty in the Hawaiian Islands in peacetime was considered to be pretty good duty, was it not?

Neff: Well, primarily, it was promotion. In the States, there was little or no promotion. Usually, you could go from a private to private first class toward the end of your first enlistment. The common saying was that

that was a re-enlistment bonus. Of course, that jumped you from \$21 to \$30 a month. But in Hawaii . . . I was only there less than two months, and I was a corporal in the artillery. Of course, when you transfer from one branch to another, you lose your rating. But in the Air Corps, in thirty days I was a sergeant. This was kind of arranged before I got there because I went there on a special assignment. People didn't want to be clerks but I did. That was my forte, and I felt that this would be my career because I had no mechanical ability. I couldn't fly. I didn't care about it but . . . although I wasn't afraid to, but I was handicapped by poor eyesight.

Marcello: Let's go back just a minute once again. When you re-enlisted, so to speak, in July of 1940 . . .

Neff: It was prior to that, about six months prior to that.

Marcello: You went to the Hawaiian Islands in July of 1940, is that the way it was?

Neff: Right.

Marcello: When you did re-enlist and during this period of time, did you have any idea at all that the country might possibly sooner or later be going into war against Japan?

Neff: I don't think that we really thought it, not against Japan but possibly against Germany. Hitler had moved into the other countries, and we were maybe having more maneuvers than usual, but they were local-type on the post. I remember one big maneuver that we had in Virginia in 1939 or 1940. No, 1939, it would have been. Just what it was, I don't know, because we didn't know as enlisted men what the thinking was of the higher military. Hawaii was good to me. I met my wife there. We got married. That was after the war started. Of course, December 7, was the outstanding event in my life probably, as far as the war was concerned.

Marcello: Now when you arrived in Hawaii, where were you stationed? Did you go directly to Hickam Field?

Neff: No, I was stationed at Fort DeRussey. That was right on Waikiki Beach. I could walk out the back door of the barracks, and within a few yards I was on the beach. This was a Coast Artillery fort, and the battery I was in didn't fire any guns. They were searchlights.

A friend of mine had approached me from 31st Bomb Squadron at Hickam if I would transfer. He was at that time the chief clerk of the squadron, and if he could

find a replacement, they would let him go to mechanic school. Now air mechanics in those days got flying pay, and that was an incentive. It took a little politicking and some other maneuvering, but I finally made it. When I got there, I was made the chief clerk and promised the first vacancy for sergeant, which was within thirty days.

Marcello: I gather that when you did transfer then, that's when you moved over to Hickam Field.

Neff: That's right. This was approximately in January of 1941.

Marcello: Describe what Hickam Field looked like.

Neff: Well, it was the last place in the service in those days that was brand new. At Fort DeRussey, I could wake up in the morning, and the termites were crawling on my bed from the old wooden barracks, where here I was moving into a place with waxed floors and concrete walls and roofs, and I just never had lived like that in the Army. So this appealed to me first. I mean, they didn't have to promote me, just give me that place to sleep that was so beautiful.

Marcello: Was the construction at Hickam Field more or less a part of a build-up for the possibility of war in the Pacific, or had this been in the works for some time, that is, the actual planning and building of the base?

Neff: I don't really know how long the base had been finished. The barracks and the administration buildings were the permanent-type buildings, plus the NCO and officers' quarters for married personnel. There were a lot of temporary buildings, too, at the time. The hangars were brand new and were equipped to house possibly two airplanes of the types we had then. I don't really know if this was something of a build-up. Of course, this was still in the depression, and the money was hard to get. The politicians weren't eager to turn anything loose.

Marcello: Let's talk a little about the social life on the Hawaiian Islands. What did a young, single, enlisted man usually do for social activities in pre-war Honolulu?

Neff: Of course, a soldier wasn't accepted too well in the society that I might have been used to traveling when I was a younger man, and you looked for entertainment on the famous Hotel Street in Honolulu. This included bars and prostitution and that type of thing. Of course, you had the movies and . . .

Marcello: I understand that Hotel Street was almost like the Bourbon Street of New Orleans in many ways in that you



had all of the bars and the tattoo parlors and things of this nature.

Neff: Exactly, exactly. It was like that. We always understood that it was controlled by the city and the military in order that . . . well, it wasn't legalized, but . . . of course, the bars were but I'm speaking of the women. There was little or no disease, and it was there, that's all.

Marcello: How often were you able to get liberty or passes to go into Honolulu and things of this nature?

Neff: The duty that I had, I could really go every night. Of course, we didn't have that kind of money. As a sergeant, I was making \$60 a month, and although there were no social security or any deductions at that time, even that didn't go very far. It wasn't any problem. A three-day pass wasn't very feasible because you had no place to go. You could go to the YMCA, or if you had the money, you could go to a hotel. Hawaii at that time was an expensive place.

Marcello: And still is today, of course.

Neff: Yes.

Marcello: Now did this routine continue right on up until December 7? I'm referring now to the ease with which you were able to get passes and this sort of thing.

Neff: No, as I recall the terminology we were on a 50 per cent alert, where you might describe it as half the personnel could go at one time and half another time. Now they did something a few months before the attack. They staggered the paydays. Normally, you were paid on the last day of the month. In those days it was once a month. I think today it's twice a month. The Air Corps was paid on the tenth of the following month. Now this was to eliminate possibly 10,000 men being in Honolulu at one time. Of course, the Navy didn't have that control because they were at sea, and their liberty started when they got into port. At the time of the attack, we were on an alert such as it was.

Marcello: Let's talk a little about that time just immediately prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor. Now the Hawaiian Islands had a relatively large Japanese population at that time. How much concern did this give the military on the island? Do you know anything about this?

Neff: No, I don't really know. The enlisted man's thinking on that, I'm sure, was nothing because he didn't know that this was coming and some . . . now that we've read something about it or by using hindsight, we find

that some military advisors did predict this, but at that time I had no knowledge that the Japanese would be there. In fact, I felt very secure.

Marcello: Why do you say that--that you felt very secure?

Neff: Well, the war was in Europe. The Japanese were invading China, but that was too far away. We have to consider that the long-range bomber hadn't been produced to a point to where somebody was going to fly from Japan to Hawaii. Nobody thought of a carrier, of course. Maybe the Navy did but we didn't.

Marcello: Did you have very many Japanese civilians working on the base or on any of the military bases around the city?

Neff: I really couldn't say. I don't recall ever seeing any, but I'm sure they were because the population of Honolulu was very cosmopolitan and the oriental was probably predominant, so I'm sure there was probably some intelligence work by the Japanese through there.

Marcello: I also know that in the months immediately prior to Pearl Harbor that all the planes at Hickam Field were usually lined up in very nice, neat rows, and evidently this was done basically for the purpose of preventing sabotage. In other words, it was easier to guard those

planes if they were in nice, neat rows than if they were scattered all around the airstrip, of course. And, later on, naturally, on December 7, that made a very good target for the Japanese, but the reason that they were in those nice, neat rows was to guard against sabotage on the part of Japanese living on the island.

Neff: Of course, there was no full strength as far as manpower was concerned, so they had to conserve somehow, and this was a logical thing to do. Actually, we didn't have the latest in airplanes when the Japanese came. They got a little fooled on that score.

Marcello: Now Hickam Field is also right next door to Pearl Harbor Naval Base actually. In fact, I think there was only a chain link fence separating the two, was there not?

Neff: That's right, yes.

Marcello: How much opportunity did you have to observe the activities of the Pacific Fleet as it went in and out?

Neff: The morning of December 7--and I can't recall any exact time, and it was in the vicinity of eight o'clock in the morning, Hawaiian time, Sunday--was a "day of rest," to coin a phrase, in the Army. There were no

duties for specific people unless they were flying and some of the crews had to be out. I was asleep and I heard these explosions, and I woke up and Sergeant Goldbloom slept next to me, and I said, "Goldie, what's going on?" "Oh," he said, "They finally fired that 18-inch gun at Fort Weaver." They'd always been talking about this, that they were going to fire it. Nobody even knew what an 18-inch gun was. We'd never seen it.

Marcello: And I gather that this was your first inkling that something was going on at Pearl Harbor?

Neff: Yes. I turned over and was going back to sleep, and I asked him again, I said, "How about those airplanes diving?" "Oh, it's just the Navy." They were always doing that. They were dive bombers, and they were rehearsing or practicing or so on. Something got me out of bed.

Marcello: Before we go any further, let's just go back here a minute because I still have some preliminary questions that I want to ask before we actually get up to the attack itself. How difficult or how easy was it to gain access to the naval base at Pearl Harbor? In other words, was it pretty easy to get on and off of

that base, or did you need to have some sort of passes or things of this nature?

Neff: To be truthful, I'd never been on it. I had no reason to go there and . . . although you met a sailor and you made friends with him possibly, I didn't know anybody over there, and I had never been at Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: How easy was it to find out any information about these military installations? In other words, could you perhaps go into a drugstore and buy a postcard with an aerial view of Pearl Harbor or Hickam Field or anything of this nature?

Neff: I really couldn't say. I had no people that I corresponded with in those days. I had some relatives, but I kind of dropped myself out of sight when I joined the Army. I wasn't ashamed of myself, but I felt perhaps it was better they didn't know. So I had no reason to look for this sort of thing.

Marcello: We mentioned awhile ago about the fact that you really didn't think the Japanese had the capabilities of ever mounting an attack on Pearl Harbor, and I assume this was perhaps a view that was shared by most of your buddies, also?

- Neff: Well, we never discussed it, I'll put it that way. I don't think anybody thought about it as such that would come there. We were completely surprised.
- Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese, what sort of person usually came to mind?
- Neff: Oh, his looks. I didn't know any in particular. We did have a steward at the NCO Club, but . . . no, I think he was a Chinaman. His name was Akai. I don't know whether that's Chinese or Japanese, but I didn't really know any people like that. I didn't hob-nob with the civilian population. My friends were all in the service.
- Marcello: Now as you get closer and closer to December 7, how did activities pick up around either Hickam Field or Pearl Harbor itself? In other words, what sort of alerts took place, or what sort of maneuvers took place? Now you talked awhile ago about the 50 per cent alert. What sort of maneuvers and other alerts and this sort of thing were taking place?
- Neff: I recall that they formed a ground defense unit which, as near as I can recall, was a certain number of men were selected from each squadron or whatever they could spare. It depended on the type of duty they

were performing. These men were trained, and the story was that we had two antiaircraft machine guns. I can remember they would run out with these things and mount them on the parade ground and attempt to fire. No ammunition was used, but they went through the maneuver of doing this. The only weapon that the Air Corps enlisted man was armed with was a .45 caliber pistol.

Marcello: Did these alerts and what have you increase in frequency as one gets closer to Pearl Harbor?

Neff: No, this 50 per cent alert that I talk about was merely that 50 per cent of the personnel remained on the base at one time.

Marcello: Let's talk now about the day immediately prior to the Japanese attack, that is, December 6, 1941. I want you to describe to me as best you can your routine on that particular day.

Neff: That was a Saturday, and we worked a half-day. The Army then was not much different than civilian life. It was a five and a half-day week except for special things. Money was scarce and you didn't fly any extra training missions or anything because of gasoline shortages. There was some night flying that had to be



tended to. That afternoon it was a common thing to have an aloha party for personnel returning to the States within the next few days. A friend of mine-- he was first sergeant of the 23rd Squadron, and his name was Helms--was returning the following week. As near as I can recall, it was Monday that he was to board the boat, the transport, to go back to the States. Of course, he waited and we came back together later in 1942. Outside of that, the day before, there was nothing any different.

Marcello: How long did this aloha party last?

Neff: It could have gone for two or three hours. The common menu for this sort of thing was steaks with soy sauce, which was a treat to any enlisted man. We didn't often get steak in a mess hall, although the food was good. And beer was also served at an aloha party. There was nothing else served, no hard liquor or anything else.

Marcello: What time would you estimate that this aloha party broke up?

Neff: Early enough. It wasn't any midnight affair. It was late in the afternoon. It was probably before supper.

Marcello: What did you do after the party was over?

Neff: Well, we didn't do anything because it was too close to payday. Nobody had any money. It was the sixth of the month, and the paydays then were on the tenth. So we were . . . it was the same for all. We just sat around and waited for the next payday. I don't recall. I didn't do anything. I stayed home in the barracks.

Marcello: So you did go back to the barracks, then, relatively early on that night of December 6.

Neff: Yes. I would say that I was in bed before midnight.

Marcello: Generally speaking, what usually was the condition of the enlisted men who came back onto the base either on a Saturday or a Sunday morning during this period of time? In other words, what I'm leading up to is this: what sort of condition would these men have been in to fight, generally, let's say, on a Sunday morning?

Neff: Well, I don't see that there would be any that . . . if you're speaking of drunkenness, on this particular weekend I would say no. Now I think that we have to remember that the Air Corps was not a volunteer organization. People volunteer for it, but they were also selected, and the personnel there was a much higher

grade than the personnel in the other branches such as the infantry, artillery, or the actual fighting branches, so to speak. So I don't recall that we ever had any so-called "drunks" in my outfit.

Marcello: This was generally the rule during the period that you were there.

Neff: That's right. I have seen drunks in other . . . in the Chemical Warfare Service, for instance, we had an old soldier. He probably had eighteen years in at that time. Every payday he got drunk. He took a three-day pass to sober up, and he stayed sober till the next payday.

Marcello: This is one of the things I wanted to get in the record then. On that night of December 6, really nothing out of the ordinary happened or anything of that nature. If there were to be an attack the following day, what men were still on base would have been in fairly good shape to fight.

Neff: Absolutely, had we had the weapons to fight.

Marcello: Usually on a weekend of this nature, what sort of a complement was there usually on the base.

Neff: You always had your guards. That was necessary. For instance, in the 31st Bomb Squadron, there was an NCO

that was assigned daily on a twenty-four hour basis known as the charge of quarters, and he would be there. Everybody was on call. Of course, there was no place to go except Honolulu, so it wouldn't be hard for the military police to round up all the soldiers. Even though they wore civilian clothes, you could always tell he was a soldier.

Marcello: Well, on a weekend of this nature, usually what percentage of the men would be off the base?

Neff: Oh, I would say it would be negligible from my experience because of the money. You just didn't have it. There were times when you were stone broke, and at this time of the month in particular.

Marcello: Then again, like you mentioned, Hickam Field was relatively close to Honolulu, and so most men would go into Honolulu and come back usually in the same evening.

Neff: That's right.

Marcello: This kind of brings us up to the fateful day itself. Here again, why don't you start with your experiences from the time that you awoke on the morning of December 7, and just proceed and follow it through to the end.

Neff: After I asked Goldbloom what was going on and he predicted they were firing the 18-inch gun and the Navy

was dive bombing, something got me out of bed. I never found out what it was, but something got me up. I put on a shirt and a pair of pants and slipped into my shoes without socks and walked out the door, and the first thing I saw was the rising sun on the wing tip of a Japanese airplane. I had never seen the Japanese markings, but I didn't have to know what it was. I didn't ask anybody. I knew immediately. As I recall, I dove into a bush. Why a bush, I don't know, because there was no protection, but it seemed to be the logical thing to do.

Then I recall going out to the street, and it was then that I saw the explosions and the fire and smoke at Pearl Harbor. The next thing that came to my mind was, "Well, I've got to be someplace." So I went for the hangar.

There was a comical incident at this time. We were trying to get weapons, which was, I think, something learned from our military training. This was the first thing you needed. So somebody was trying to get into the armament shack where the pistols were locked, and nobody was available with a key, so somebody blew the lock off with their shotgun. Where the

gun came from, I don't know. Then in rushed the armament chief, and he wanted everybody to sign receipts for the weapons, which somebody politely told him what to do (chuckle), and we were all armed. I don't ever remember, personally, whether I got the pistol that was assigned to me or not. Then I went back to the barracks, and there was a lull in the fighting, which I think is now in the history books.

Marcello: In other words, this is the first wave that had come in, and the second wave had not yet arrived.

Neff: That's right. Of course, I had spent some time at the flight line, but there was nothing that could be done. The airplanes were burning.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what the field looked like after this first attack. Describe it in your own words.

Neff: As you mentioned before, the airplanes were lined up three abreast. There was nothing that . . . they could have spit out of their airplanes and hit them. They were on fire. For some reason they had hit the firehouse. The firehouse was situated near the barracks, and over it was the guardhouse where the military prisoners were housed. The fire equipment was virtually put out of commission by these bombs. Everybody presumed

there had been some intelligence gathered about this. How they could determine the markings or what, I don't know, but they did it. So we had no fire equipment to fight these fires.

Marcello: Generally speaking, during this first attack, what would you say was the general reaction of the men? Was it panic, fear, frustration? How would you describe the general reaction of the personnel here during this first attack?

Neff: I don't think there was fear as such that . . . I have to think that as a soldier I was trained to do certain things. Now this came automatically with me. I never gave it a thought that maybe this guy was going to fly over any minute and drop a bomb on my head. I didn't see any people during the first wave who were hurt or injured or wounded of any sort, and the people that we lost were in the mess hall. They were cooks. The mess hall had gotten hit, and as I remember, there were four men killed in our squadron. They were all cooks.

Marcello: Now generally speaking, what course did this first attack take. Was it both bombing and strafing?

Neff: Yes, they strafed the airfield and the barracks and tried to blow the flagpole up, but they didn't make it. They

dropped the bomb near it. They also bombed the hospital, but they didn't hit it.

Marcello: Like you mentioned awhile ago, the fact that that firehouse was knocked out of commission was a rather serious blow to the base, was it not?

Neff: Yes, I would say so.

Marcello: What sort of measures could be taken under those circumstances in order to try and control the blazes and the fires?

Neff: There wasn't much to be done because a hand extinguisher was no good in a gasoline fire, of course. So these airplanes . . . they were able to get to some who were not burning and tow them out of the fire area. However, these airplanes were B-18's, which was a twin-engine airplane and a very slow, outmoded thing. We had had B-17's there, but they had sent them to the Philippines, I believe, in September of 1941 with crews. We were, there again, low on personnel from these crews being transferred. As I remember, we had one B-17A, which was not even the latest model B-17, but again it was a question of the politicians not being able to . . . or not furnishing equipment for this sort of thing. But a bomber would have been of no use, unless they



had gotten one off the ground armed and could have found a carrier and blown it up.

Marcello: Did very many planes get off the ground during this first attack in order to meet the Japanese?

Neff: There were none from Hickam. We had a squadron of A-20's. These airplanes were camouflaged. They were painted a dark color, where the B-18's I mentioned were silver with no paint. They were lined up three abreast but at a different section of the field. They weren't touched.

Marcello: What sort of resistance did you see being put up during this first attack? Were soldiers simply shooting anything they had at these airplanes or just what happened?

Neff: I don't recall seeing anything like that. There was nothing to shoot with. A .45 pistol isn't good much over fifty yards, and these airplanes were moving pretty fast. There was nothing to shoot with. The antiaircraft was not at Hickam Field at that time. That was another part of the Army, antiaircraft artillery.

Marcello: Before we get to that second attack, I think there's something else that needs to be put into the record at this time. What was the climate like on that particular day? Do you recall? What were weather conditions like?

Neff: The weather? Oh, beautiful. It always rained in Hawaii, but you never got wet. It was a mist. Around Hickam Field, the rain wasn't much. We were down on the sea coast, and the rains came in the valleys where the flowers and the pineapples grow and that sort of thing.

Marcello: In other words, atmospheric and climatic conditions were ideal for an air attack on December 7.

Neff: It was perfect! It couldn't have been better! The visibility was unlimited. There was no problem.

Marcello: So what did you do between the first attack and the second attack? You mentioned that you did go over to the armory at least and draw out a .45.

Neff: Well, I came back to the barracks and put on my socks! My equipment was in a wall locker. Whoever got me out of that bed did me a favor because there were a few bullet holes in my wall locker where they had strafed the barracks.

Marcello: What made you think to put on your socks? Is this simply one of those imponderables that you don't know why you decided to do it?

Neff: I really don't know except I wore socks all the time, and I didn't have any in my shoes. Maybe I thought

I needed them. I might need them later on. I wanted to die with my socks on (chuckle). Then I got a helmet--I was trained to do this--and a gas mask.

So I did what I was supposed to do and put these things on, and I was . . . didn't know exactly what to do. Now I was in a personnel section which was in a different part of the base. It wasn't located in the barracks, and I was standing in the doorway with the squadron adjutant, and I don't recall the other man, but Sergeant Sanders came running out of another door. He was first sergeant of the 72nd Squadron.

He said, "Here they come again!" So I was right behind him. As we hit the street curb, a bomb dropped about a half a block away, and the concussion knocked us down. I was laying at his feet behind him, and I happened to turn my head and saw this piece of curbing--it wasn't large, but a little bigger than a brick maybe--coming through the air, and it hit him between the knee and the butt on the back of the leg. He turned around, and he said, "They got me!" I started laughing. Of course, he used a few choice names about me laughing at him when he was wounded. I said, "Well, look what hit you!" And then he started to laugh. So

there was a little comedy there, too. Later, he was wounded. He got shot through the foot. He was a fighting Irishman. Nothing kept him down. He was out of there. I went across to the parade ground and . . .

Marcello: I assume you were not hurt at all by being knocked down by this concussion.

Neff: No, it didn't even daze me. It was just a blow, and I often think I fell down instinctively. This was the thing to do. As I was crossing the parade ground, a soldier came limping toward me and crying for help. This was the first wounded man I had seen. He was shot in the leg. The next thing to do instinctively, I got out the first aid packet. I never had opened one before. You open it like a can of sardines. I applied this to the wound and then put a tourniquet on it. I got him over to the street, and the ambulances were coming around picking up wounded. I don't even know who he was.

Marcello: In the meantime, while you were doing this, was the attack still continuing, or had that wave already ended?

Neff: No, it was in and he had a .30 caliber rifle. I presumed he was part of this ground defense. So for

some reason, I picked up this rifle and fired the clip at this Japanese airplane. I'm sure I didn't hit it, but I had to do it. Then I threw the rifle away. I went over to the personnel section, and the people were there. This was a group set-up. All the squadrons had representatives, and we took care of the personnel records in there. There was a Sergeant Laver, who was the group sergeant major, and he . . . something . . . there was a lot of shooting all of a sudden. Of course, you couldn't ever tell whether it was the Japanese coming again or our own people. People were getting a little trigger-happy. So he and I dove under the desk at this next burst of fire and bumped heads going under the desk (chuckle). Now I don't think the desk would have done us much good. That was about the extent of the attack, and then it was over.

Marcello: During this second attack, was a substantial amount of resistance thrown up at the Japanese, or was it more or less a repetition of the first attack?

Neff: I remember seeing some shelling from Pearl Harbor by the Navy, from those ships that still had guns that were working. The bulk of the fleet that was put out of commission was the heavy ships, battleships.

Marcello: Generally speaking, I gather that there wasn't a whole lot of resistance of any sort put up at Hickam.

Neff: There was nothing to resist with. Hickam had nothing to resist with.

Marcello: I assume that Hickam depended on the airplanes. If there were an attack and if you knew about the attack, the airplanes would have been sent up.

Neff: The bomber wasn't the airplane to counterattack this force. That was done from Wheeler Field. Of course, they were under attack, too.

Marcello: I gather, then, that you didn't have very many fighter planes at Hickam Field?

Neff: None. No, it was a bomber base. We had light bombers and heavy bombers.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you more or less out of frustration, I suppose, did fire a clip from that rifle at the Japanese planes, and I'm sure that you probably saw a great deal of this sort of thing going on. In other words, I'm sure that you were simply . . . you must have had some sort of feeling of helplessness, perhaps, that you had to do something, so, like you say, you fired at those Japanese planes with that rifle. I'm sure you must have seen other people do that.

Neff: I don't recall seeing anybody else doing it. The mechanics and the people involved with the aircraft were where they should be. I really had no place to go except the personnel section. I thought, "Well, what can they do down there? They can burn up the service records if they catch fire, that's all." I don't know whether I was thinking that I was better off helping somebody else in another area or not. Of course, I think my main thought was that I should be with my organization.

Marcello: How long did you actually think that the entire attack took?

Neff: After it was over, I estimated two hours.

Marcello: And how long did it take altogether? Was it about two hours?

Neff: I think so, yes. Of course, there was that lull between the first and second wave.

Marcello: This is a more or less a psychological reaction perhaps, but what was it like after the attack was finished and the planes had gone away? In other words, all of a sudden, I'm sure, at the time of the attack there was confusion, noise, shouting, and all this sort of thing. How about when the attack was over? Was there

some sort of an eerie quiet or . . . how would you describe it?

Neff: I think that's when I got scared. Immediately, say within the next week, we had troops from the States in there, and they posted sentries on every corner. Where there were cross-streets, I could count four sentries. If you had to go out after dark, it seemed like every step you took you could hear a bullet in a rifle being shoved into the chamber, and you didn't know whether to lay down, run, or what. There were incidents of firing. I don't know of anybody that got hurt or killed through that. The people rose up, you know, the American people. This was something that never happened.

Marcello: Now during the attack, I know that some B-17's were also coming in from the West Coast. Did any of these B-17's attempt to land here at Hickam while you were there?

Neff: No. To my knowledge, none landed there. They landed on other islands which were not under attack, and I believe they landed possibly at Bellows Field on the opposite side of the island. As far as I remember, none of those airplanes were damaged.



Marcello: I also know that the water mains at Hickam Field were also damaged and destroyed, and I'm sure that made firefighting also tough, in addition to the fact that the firehouse itself had been hit.

Neff: For several days we were without water. We had drinking water. I think they hauled it in from possibly Honolulu, but the johns and facilities to wash were cut off.

Marcello: Well, let's talk a little about the aftermath of the attack. What took place immediately after all of the fighting had come to a halt?

Neff: One of the first things they did was declare prohibition, which was bad (chuckle). The "slant eyes," as we called them, had blown up the beer garden, and Honolulu immediately locked up all the liquor and other hard drinks.

I would like to remark on the civilians. Now prior to this, the soldier had no place . . . enlisted men had no place in certain areas. He wasn't banned, understand, but he just didn't go there. These people opened their homes to the dependents of married personnel. I recall going with an officer . . . he was a group adjutant whose wife had given birth to, I believe, a son not too many days before the attack.

Another sergeant and I went with him. Why, I don't know. We were asked to go--so we did--to this home that was up toward the Pali, which was a very famous spot. This was a beautiful home, not an estate, but a nice place. We stayed outside like we were supposed to do, and this man came bursting out the front door and said we were wanted inside. So we went up there, and he offered us a drink. He had it all, so we each drank a beer. That's the best beer, I think, I ever had in my life (chuckle).

In the aftermath, of course, there was damage, but there wasn't any to the city. It was all done to military targets.

Marcello: I assume what damage had been done to the city itself probably came from falling flak and that sort of thing, did it not, shrapnel from the antiaircraft guns?

Neff: I think one bomb fell in Honolulu, but I think the damage was negligible.

Marcello: What sort of orders and instructions did you have after the attack? What were you to do?

Neff: We immediately had blackouts, and you were restricted. There was no night life. Everything closed down in the city and on the military installations. Of course,

you covered windows and the lights were allowed, but you didn't dare show anything. Nothing happened after that. That was the end. The two-hour attack was the last that anybody ever saw the Japanese.

Marcello: I'm sure that all sorts of rumors must have been floating around after that attack had taken place. Do you remember some of the rumors that you heard? As wild and ridiculous as they were at the time, can you remember any of them?

Neff: There was some . . . a bar near Scofield Barracks that was run by a Japanese, and there was one story that he committed hara-kiri. They came after him, whether there was a military order or whether there was just a bunch of guys going in there and do it. He dressed himself in the ceremonial robe and committed hara-kiri. Now this was hearsay. I don't know. I didn't even know where the place was because the only time I ever went to Scofield Barracks was for football or baseball or something like that.

Marcello: Did you ever hear that the Japanese were already making some sort of a seaborne landing or something on the island?

Neff: There were rumors that they went on other islands, but the . . . actually, the troops now . . . when I was

in the coast artillery, we had an area to cover, and we had a base camp. This area was on the north side of the island. I don't know whether these men ever got to where they were supposed to go or not, but I would presume they did because the concentration was on the Air Corps and the Navy. The rest of the installations had no damage to it, like Fort DeRussey where I had been stationed.

Marcello: I've also heard rumors to the effect that the Japanese had poisoned the water supply, and there were reports of some paratroopers landing on the island and things of this nature. Have you ever heard any of these rumors floating around?

Neff: Yes, the water supply poisoning, I recall that. Of course, immediately they brought out the Lister bags, and the water was purified through this. Nobody liked to drink it because it tasted of chlorine but we did. In fact, as I remember, that's the only way we could get water.

Marcello: These were called Lister bags?

Neff: I think that's the man that developed it or the person that developed it. That was common during the war. We had those in other places.

Marcello: I'm sure that there were also a lot of trigger-happy servicemen around that particular night, and probably it wouldn't be too safe to venture.

Neff: No, it's like I said. That was when I got scared, traveling at night. This personnel section, we moved it to a set of quarters, the NCO quarters. Everybody moved in there and slept in there. We had to go to the barracks to eat. Sometimes you'd be up there, and the first thing you'd know, it'd be dark and you still had to get back there somehow. So every step I would take, I could hear those bolts going home in the rifle.

Marcello: Were you able to hear shots ringing out periodically during the night?

Neff: Yes, nothing like a machine gun, but maybe a rifle shot or something like that. There was one . . . something happened. I believe it was at night or it might have been the next night. Now that's where my memory fails me. The Navy fired on one of its own airplanes coming in for a landing. For some reason, evidently it wasn't identified properly, or they didn't know it was coming.

Marcello: In fact, I think the Navy fired on several of their own planes coming in that night.

Neff: It might have been a question of fire first and ask questions afterwards.

Marcello: Now after the Japanese attack, was there talk about taking out some sort of retribution against the Japanese civilian population? Did you hear anything of this nature floating around the base?

Neff: No, but I think the FBI could be commended though. They immediately rounded up all of these people. They must have known who they were, but there was nothing that could be done about it until this happened. They were immediately put under custody on a small island within the harbor, within Honolulu Harbor, not Pearl Harbor but Honolulu Harbor. What happened to them during the war, I don't know. Of course, this happened in the States, where we know on the Pacific Coast the Japanese were rounded up, too. But they were evidently intelligence people for the Japanese. The FBI knew them. They put them away right away.

Marcello: Generally speaking, how would you assess the civilian conduct in the immediate aftermath of the raid? Now you talked about it here briefly awhile ago.

Neff: First, they opened their homes to the dependents because they had to evacuate, and I think that they should be

commended--I really do--for what they did. These people weren't in a financial state where they could go to a hotel and pay for food and lodging. These people took them in and took care of them. There were a lot of enlisted men who were married, and the first "three graders," we called them, master sergeants, "techs," and staff, and they had dependents and some had big families, lots of children. It made no difference because they were welcome in these homes. I didn't get to town for, oh, it might have been a month after it started. There was no reason because you had to go in the daytime. You couldn't go at night.

Marcello: As you look back in retrospect on the Pearl Harbor attack, what are your own opinions as to how it happened? In other words, the Japanese had achieved complete surprise. Why? In other words, I heard one of the other men say that Pearl Harbor was prepared but it wasn't alert.

Neff: That's possible but, of course, as far as the Japanese thinking, the only thing I can think of is that they must have had some nuts or crazy people who had this idea they were going to conquer the United States and dictate from Washington, which was the story, and I

believe it is now history. In my opinion six months after they arrived, the war was . . . they were on the defensive. The Battle of Midway changed the tide for them because they'd lost, I believe, two big carriers down there. In fact, a friend of mine was awarded the Distinguished . . .

Marcello: They lost four big carriers down there, as a matter of fact.

Neff: He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for launching a torpedo that blew up the Japanese carrier. They used B-26's to do this, and they modified them to carry torpedoes. That was a highly successful battle. As far as the Japanese are concerned, they'd had it.

Marcello: But again, getting back to Pearl Harbor itself, how were the Japanese able to achieve complete surprise that day?

Neff: I think, as near as I can think, I wasn't expecting anything like this. I don't think anybody else was, but like I said before, I can't speak for the high military and what the intelligence was. It didn't reach us, that sort of thing. We weren't prepared. Even had we known they were coming, what could we



have done about it? We might have put fighter planes in the air to patrol and knock them out or sent some bombers out to look for the carriers, but they had the strong arm. That was it. And the fleet was in the harbor. Had it been at sea, it might have been different. I just don't know. They achieved what they started out to do, but that's as far as they got.

Marcello: In the aftermath of the attack, did the enlisted men look for scapegoats? In other words, who did they blame for this having taken place? Did they blame, let's say, General Short, Admiral Kimmel, or some other high-ranking officer?

Neff: No, I don't think so. In fact, I don't recall that anybody even blamed the Congress, which they would today, of course, because we're older and we know more. Most of us felt that Admiral Kimmel and General Short were "hung," so to speak. They took the rap for the whole thing. I don't believe that anybody could have done anything about this because they had no plans. If they did . . . some people predicted this, but who they were, I don't know or how they predicted it or what. I don't think we had the intelligence that we knew that were coming. I don't think either the General or the Admiral were to blame for this thing.

Marcello: I gather that you do feel that perhaps had congressional appropriations been larger and had more money been spent for defense on the island, perhaps things may have been just a little bit better.

Neff: Oh, yes! I think so, but how did they know they were coming, too, see? Don't forget the times. We were still in the depression. My thinking is that the war got us out of the depression and that's all. That was a big turning point because people went to work and you ate and slept well from then on. Before it was a little different.