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Place of Interview: El Paso, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Terms of Use: Open

Approved: Leon P. Sell Sr.
(Signature)

Date: 13 June 1976

Oral History Collection

Leon Sell

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: El Paso, Texas Date: June 13, 1976

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Leon Sell for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on June 13, 1976, in El Paso, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Sell in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was stationed at Schofield Barracks during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Now Mr. Sell, to begin this interview, would you just very briefly give me a 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.

Mr. Sell: All right. I was born on the 23rd day of Feburary, 1920, at Wallis, Texas, which is actually in Austin County. I went to Wallis High School, which was a little country school in a small community. I went through the eighth grade there.

I left Wallis and decided that I was going to volunteer and go into the Army, which I did. I enlisted in San Antonio, Texas at Fort Sam Houston.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the service?

Sell: At that time, I had gotten into a disagreement with the high school football coach. We were on our way to a bi-district football game, and we had pulled into a filling station to get gas. Prior to departure from the high school, we were told that we could go in a privately owned vehicle, but we would not stop anywhere enroute. Particularly so, to which they were of the impression that we might consume some beer or alcohol or intoxicating beverages.

This wasn't our intention. What we had actually done, the individual that was driving the car had goofed and really ran out of gas. We pulled into the filling station, and while the attendant was filling the gas tank, we decided we were going to have something to drink. We were actually drinking pop.

A school bus came by just about that time, and, of course, who would be looking out the window at us but the football coach. Nothing more was said; nothing was mentioned about this thing until we got to, which at that time was Richmond, Texas, which was where the bi-district game was being played. As a matter of fact, it was the first night game that our high school in that area was playing. When we got there, we got out of the car and walked over to the gym, and the coach met us at the door

and told us, "Just don't even bother coming in. Turn around, get back in the car, and go back home. You are not playing tonight. You were violating the rules." And that was all there to it.

Well, we tried to explain what had happened prior, he didn't believe us. Needless to say, we didn't play.

So with that in mind, it "teed" two of us off, so we just decided, well, we were going to go join the Army, you know. On a dare, this is what we did. In fact, we left and went to Houston instead of going back to Wallis. We went to Houston, Texas, and when we arrived there, of course, it was late at night, and we didn't have anyplace to stay, and we didn't know a soul. So we just kind of sort of hung around the post office, which we had the address where the Army recruiter was at at the time.

We waited until early the next morning. In fact, we were asleep on the bench in the post office, and when the janitors started cleaning up in there, the noise woke us. So we asked them what time the Army recruiter opened, and he told us eight o'clock. For some unknown reason that particular morning, they got there about seven-thirty. It was the sergeant, and he took us in and asked us what we wanted, and we told him.

Of course, I was tall and large for my age, anyway. He said, "Well, how old are you?" I told him, I said, "Well, you want my truthful age, or you want the age that would make me legal to get in the Army?" He says, "Well, we can't enlist you under false pretenses. We'll have to have your correct age." I said, "Well, I'm fifteen." So he said, "Well, you're tall enough, you're big enough to get by for an eighteen-year-old, but we'll have to have your parents permission."

So we didn't know for sure whether our parents would go along with it or not, so they said, "Do your parents have a phone?" I said, "No, they don't, but the neighbors across the street do." So I gave them their number, and they called and got my dad. I talked to my dad, and he said, "Well, if this is what you want, if you want to join the Army, I won't stop you." He said, "I'd rather you wouldn't, but I'm not going to stop you."

So they actually made out the papers and everything. It was just a thirty-minute drive from Houston home, so they put us on a bus and sent us home, and we got the papers signed and notarized and were back on the evening bus. In fact, that night we left Houston for San Antonio on a train, already in the service.

Marcello: Now what year was that?

Sell: This was in 1936, September 8th.

Marcello: And why did you decide to join the Army as opposed to one of the other branches?

Sell: In fact, at that time, the Navy required a high school education. You had to have a diploma. I didn't know too much about the Marines Corps, and at that time, of course, it still was the Army Air Corps. It wasn't a separate unit. So about the only thing that was left open to us was the Army, so we decided that we would go ahead and try the Army.

Marcello: When did you ultimately get to the Hawaiian Islands?

Sell: Well, I went to San Antonio, as I said. I was stationed there with H Company, 23rd Infantry, which was an infantry outfit. I stayed with them for two years, and then in '38, I believe it was, the Army started cutting back on its mules and animals. In other words, they deactivated, reactivated, and started forming, which at that time was the old "triangle divisions," into what they called "square division." So they were deciding to get rid of the mules. Well, I was assigned to a machine gun company as assistant machine gunner, and I had responsibility of maintaining the ammunition on the machine gun cart, which was drawn by a mule. So when they decided to deactivate and modernize them, they got rid of all the animals. What they were going to utilize them for and what they were going to do with them, they decided to transfer them all to the remount station up in Montana. So what they did, they

said, "Okay, now we're going to transfer the animals up there. You have a choice. Do you want to go with the animals up to the remount station at Fort Francis E. Warren, Wyoming? Do you want to go with the animals to that unit, or would you prefer to be transferred to the hospital here [which at that time, was the old Station Hospital] in San Antonio?" I said, "Oh, I would just as soon stay here in San Antonio." So they said, "Okay, fine. We will transfer you, then to the Station Hospital.

So this is what had happened. We were transferred from the Veterinary Corps to the Medical Corps, which was the old Station Hospital at San Antonio. Now it was called the Station Hospital at that time, and then as the draft grew nearer and nearer and nearer in '40, they started spreading out and opening up new camps, new units, and all. Well, I had, up until then, worked in the operating room and also in the supply room. Well, as it happened, they were transferring a cadre from Fort Sam Houston to Camp Wolters, which was a new replacement depot--training depot--that was being opened up at that time up at Mineral Wells, Texas.

We were transferred up there to that unit. Okay, I got stationed there at Wolters as a supply sergeant. I was there approximately four months when orders came in assigning me to Schofield Barracks in Hawaii, which was, at

that time, the old 11th Medical Brigade, because they were in a process of changing over, too, from a "square division" to a modern unit. So what happened was, actually, I was sent over, and a sergeant who had already been over there, served his time, came back. It was just a replacement position, in other words, with the same rank and same unit. So I was sent over to the 11th Medical Brigade at Schofield Barracks.

Marcello: And when was this?

Sell: This was in 1940, long about September of '40.

Marcello: What'd you think about the idea of going to the Hawaiian Islands?

Sell: Well, at that time, I was trying to go to China, you know. We had military personnel stationed in China at that time, and I had applied, actually, for an assignment to an infantry unit in China. But if you will remember at that time, they had a little bit of a rumble going on over there, and they started pulling the American troops and forces out of there. They said, "Well, the best thing that we can do for you right at the present time is send you to Hawaii. You have a choice. We do have an opening in Corregidor in the Philippines, or you can go to Schofield Barracks in Hawaii." So I thought, "Well, I'll go to Hawaii," which I'm kind of glad I did because of the results that

wound up. A friend of mine that took the Philippine assignment, I have not heard anything as to what happened to him or his whereabouts to this day.

But I went over and joined, at that time was, the 11th Medical Brigade, and as I said, they were in the process and procedure of rebuilding. In other words, they were modernizing themselves. When I got over there, I had already been in the grade of staff sergeant for a year in the States. So the time I got to Hawaii in a new shuffle, this had put me into the ranking sergeant in the 11th Medical Brigade, and at that time, when they deactivated and reactivated, they formed the first sergeant slots that came out with the diamond for the very first time. In other words, they gave them the extra stripe along with the diamond, and I was the most qualified. I just lucked into it and was promoted; I wasn't there a month and got promoted, which is unusual. Usually the promotions don't come that fast.

Marcello: Now how old were you at this time?

Sell: I was . . . let's see, about nineteen.

Marcello: You must have been one of the youngest sergeants in the Army.

Sell: I sure was. I was real young because I had to give my age as eighteen to begin with. I wasn't, actually; I was

sixteen. As a matter of fact, I was just eighteen years of age when the actual attack hit.

Marcello: Well, describe what Schofield Barracks looked like from a physical standpoint at the time that you arrived.

Sell: Well, when we first got there, of course, we were actually in the old 11th Artillery Brigade area, which were the old wooden-built barracks. They were . . . oh, they're the type that were--pre-fabricated is the word I'm trying to think of--pre-fabricated-type of building that was put together basically for the draft, to take care of the incoming personnel and so forth and so on. We were actually housed and billeted in these, which were supposed to be temporary quarters until a permanent quarters were built.

We went into what was a normal training program at that time. Everything was scheduled in the military manner. You had classes. Of course, you started with your roll call in the morning, and then you had training classes. This went on throughout the morning until about eleven o'clock. At eleven o'clock, that was the last formation of that morning. Now at eleven o'clock, you took a roll call, and it was mandatory participation in some sport for the afternoon. In other words, you had to participate in either football, baseball, basketball, tennis, volleyball, horseshoes, swimming--some form of sport. But they had a

great big sports program going at that particular time. This is what we actually did in the afternoon--we participated. I played baseball with the staff baseball team there at Schofield.

Marcello: I understand that sports did play a very, very prominent role in the life of the military in the Hawaiian Islands in that pre-Pearl Harbor period.

Sell: It was. It was very prominent, particularly so in baseball, football, boxing, and basketball. They were the four predominant-type of sports. You had to participate in some of them. In other words, they kind of sort of had a screening program. They would give every individual an opportunity to participate in this particular sport of his choosing. If he could make the team and qualify, you know, then he was actually made a member of that particular team. He participated in that particular sport. If he didn't for some various reasons such as a physical handicap, there was a program that he could fit in. In other words, they would just make sure that there was some particular type of program that he could participate in. A lot of them went bowling; a lot of them took swimming; a lot of them. . .they had ping-pong, which was another predominant program that was going on at that particular time.

In fact, there was an inter-island competition that, I think, by far was tops in the military in that era. There

was, like, the 35th Infantry Regiment, which had a real good football team. If you will remember Lieutenant Monk Myers, who was one of the later, I understand, graduated from West Point who made All-American--the first one, I think, in the military. Of course, Doc Blanchard and that group in there. . .well, they had some real good football games going, you know. We had baseball. Then, of course, there was the Navy, which was always our rivalry, particularly so in sports and the activities that took place there.

Then usually, with the close of that day or at the end of that day after, say, retreat, the evenings were pretty much your own. In other words, you had your own social life. If you wanted to go to the NCO Club, which they did have at that time, you were free to do so. Now you had. . . say, like your first three graders. They had what they called overnight passes. In other words, they could stay out overnight. Unless the man was married and singly living in the barracks, most of them had to be back in the barracks by midnight. But your married personnel and then, of course, your NCO's, which at that time were staff, tech, and master sergeants, were allowed to stay out all night. That was an extra privilege that was given them.

Marcello: Did this liberty routine more or less continue right on up to the Japanese attack, with the exception of the times when you were perhaps on alerts and things of that nature?

Sell: That's right. That is correct. In fact, we had been on maneuvers; we had gone into the field on maneuvers numerous times prior to the leading up to the morning of the December 7th raid. But this particular morning, what made it so different from any of the others. . .I was first sergeant of the. . . at that time, of course, we had converted from the 11th Brigade to the 25th Medical Battalion, which was a field hospital. I was first sergeant of D Company, 25th Medical Battalion.

All right, at that time, we had gone into the field. We would maybe take litters, and we would take rations for two or three days or a week, depending on the time that was estimated we would be in the field. But we would not take any of our normal narcotics or our drugs or our medication that more or less was "lock-and-key items," as we referred to it.

This particular alert when we went into the field on the first of December, they said, "Take everything." We questioned the order because "everything" meant. . ."Do our narcotics go?" "Yes, everything. Take your alcohol. You are going into the field. You're going to dig in." Well, this is the first time that we actually dug trenches; we actually sandbagged our operating rooms down; our hospital tents were covered with sandbags; we were actually under a

macadamia nuts farm, which actually was camouflaged from the air. We had a pretty good cover for our position.

But we went into the fields. We just set everything up. Nothing was opened, but it was there. It was available.

Marcello: Okay, let me ask a few questions at this point. I think this is a good place for me to break in. Now were you trained as a medical corpsman, and did you receive this training back in San Antonio?

Sell: Yes. Actually, at that time we had what was known as an "on-the-job training" course that was going on at Fort Sam Houston. So I went through the ward personnel training course and also the operating room training course. This was a. . .in other words, you had an NCO or an instructor assigned to you, and you were given literature, booklets, and manuals that you referred to and used as in a normal study course. But basically, you actually worked under supervision, and you got the training first-hand because you were in the operating rooms--you assisted. We were actually sent over to the hospital and did part of our training, like, at Fort Sam Houston. Now they did have a school--a surgical technician's course--set up for the military at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. But there were so many people waiting to attend these courses that by the time that you got around to your name coming up to go, your

three years were practically up in the service. So in order to kind of speed things up, they set up their own training programs.

So actually I worked in the operating room about four years--circulating, scrubbing, assisting with the operations, and so forth and so on. We actually rotated. We worked in the emergency room; we worked in the cast room; we worked in the main operating room; we worked in central supply in which we put up our sterile supplies; we autoclaved our supplies. We actually took care of the biggest part of our own equipment, in other words. Of course, this was always checked and supervised to make sure that it was sterile--it wasn't contaminated. We had it double-checked to make sure.

Basically we received this and then the knowledge from the classes we had at Schofield Barracks, which was a continuous training program, see. We would have classroom bandaging, first aid, splinting. This went on continuously. This was maybe a two-hour program in the morning. Then you had an hour of close-order drill; then you had maybe a break in between there; then you went back to, say, maybe litters, ambulance loading, and so forth and so on. It was a regularly scheduled training program which was a continuous revolving thing while we were over there, and this took

care of the biggest part of the morning. As I said before, in the afternoon most of that then went into sports programs.

Marcello: Well, without putting words in your mouth, it seems as though you received a rather thorough training in terms of what a medical corpsman needed to know and needed to do in the field.

Sell: Well, you did. You had the knowledge; in other words, the opportunity was there. If the individual made use of it, he could gain valuable knowledge. Of course, I'm sure you've run across a few in your profession where you'll see some that are real interested in certain items or certain curriculum, and others that would just as soon be doing something else. We had the same thing. We had some real good instructors; we had some mediocre-type instructors. I credit a lot of my knowledge and learning and training to the staff because at that time we had nurses and we had doctors that volunteered their own time on their own time and that came out and taught classes. Through bits of information and through their knowledge, we gained an awful lot. We learned a tremendous amount from just listening to them. . . doing dummy suturing.

In other words, we would. . .I tell you, we tried to suture more peaches and apples and oranges and what-have-you because this was a good way to really train your personnel.

I tell you, a lot of people laugh and think it's a big joke, but when you go to shave a person prior to surgery, this in itself is an art because you can cut the patient if you're not careful. This makes the doctor most unhappy because there's always that possibility of infection. The patient going to surgery doesn't need that. So the least number of nicks you do, the less chance of contamination, the less chance of infection. So what they would do, they would go to the mess hall and get peaches--the fuzzier the better. For a final examination, they would give us a peach, and they'd say, "Okay, shave it." This in itself takes a little practice because you can count the nicks on the peach, I'll tell you. When you get to the point where you can shave the fuzz of the peach and keep the minimum number of nicks down, you can pretty well shave personnel. But this is what we used for practice. Same thing with injections--we used oranges to inject rather than using each other or animals. Of course, now I understand they have a more profound training course set up since that time. I found this out because I went through another course after this, but this was quite a number of years later.

At that time, we didn't have too much to work with. In fact, when we went to the field, we had the only. . . on

our medical kit, the NCO kit, which was the normal triangular bandages, field bandages, big bulky dressings; we had gauze, tape; we had bandages; we had a suture kit, which we were taught to do minor sutures, minor surgery, which was in case of an emergency where you could sew or stop a bleeder by clamping it; we had sterile kits. The only packet that we had at that time--because penicillin was in the minds of our laboratory technicians trying to perfect it at that time--the only thing that we carried with us in a first-aid packet was sulfanilamide. In fact, this was the only thing that we had available to put in the wounds the morning of that raid. We'd just tear the packet open and sprinkle the sulfanilamide powder into the wound itself and then put a dressing over it and tag them and get them to the hospital as soon as possible where they could get proper care.

Marcello: What was the morale like in that pre-Pearl Harbor Army? Speak for your unit in particular.

Sell: Well, actually, the thing that surprised everybody was the fact that. . .well, can we go back to the first of December which was a payday? As you know, personnel were in the field when they got paid. Well, I was first sergeant, so naturally they pounded my ears as to, "What are we gonna do? Are we gonna get a pass? Are we gonna

be able to get off for the weekend?" Well, basically, we had received no information that they could or could not go on pass. So I checked with my commanding officer, and he said, "Well, let's give the headquarters a call and see what they can come up with." So he called the 25th Division, which headquarters were at Schofield Barracks at that time. They said they in turn would have to check with "division," but something would be forthcoming within the next day or so. So the only bit of information we got was that until we heard officially, we were to continue on in the field, which we were, with our same training program that we actually were doing in Schofield Barracks, see. We were set, but we had time on our hands, so we actually went back into bandaging, splinting, and routine training. So this Friday about three o'clock the field phone rang.

Marcello: And this would have been Friday of December 5th.

Sell: December 5th. We got a phone call from Captain Samples, who I knew personally. I knew his voice, and I knew who it was because over the phone normally you don't take an order unless it's followed up by a written order or unless you know the individual personally. At that time, because of the possibility of fake orders and saboteurs and so forth and so on, we had been alerted to be on a special lookout. The phone call I got was verbatim--to give the

information to Captain Gold, who was my CO at the time, that we were to allow 10 per cent of our command to go on pass Saturday morning, and they would come back at six o'clock Saturday night. Then everybody would remain in the area, and the balance of the command would go Sunday morning and stay in town and then come back at six o'clock Sunday night. Incidentally, I might add that we were brought out of the field back into Schofield Barracks for this week-end, and then we were to go back out again on Monday morning. Now the only thing that was left in our area was our guard--our security guard.

Marcello: Did you bring in all of your equipment and things of that nature?

Sell: No, our equipment was left in the field, see. This is what caught us short, because our equipment was in the field, and the personnel were in Schofield Barracks and in downtown Honolulu.

Marcello: When did you come back to Schofield Barracks?

Sell: Actually, we came back that Friday. We were actually brought out of the field by trucks back into Schofield. We were in the barracks, and we were allowed to let 10 per cent of the command go. Well, you know and I know--you let 10 per cent go--by the time that five o'clock rolled around, there wasn't a soul in the barracks except the CQ, the

guard, the personnel that was on duty, the cooks, etc. Everybody else was gone.

Marcello: Now this was true for the entire barracks?

Sell: This was true for the whole battalion. In other words, they were just gone, see.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. Now were these alerts being taken seriously, or had there been so many of them that they were becoming routine, and there was a tremendous amount of griping and grousing about having to go out in the field?

Sell: That's my personal opinion. We had been on so many of them. Everytime we turned around, we were going out in the field; we were being pulled in for this manuever or that maneuver or this parade or that parade. A lot of the people actually had just more or less approached this particular time with the same idea in mind: "Oh, it's just another one of those dry-run-type things. Nobody's going to say anything. Nobody's going to miss anybody. We might as well take advantage of it because tomorrow they may decide to go back into the field, and we won't be able to go." So this is what had happened with a lot of them.

But leading up to this, this was the first time, though, that--and I had been over in Hawaii quite a while--but this was the first time that I found out that usually the Japanese

people on the island didn't associate too much with Americans up until this weekend. Then they were real, real friendly. They had kind of sort of bent over backwards to get along. As a matter of fact, I'd go so far as to say if you'd walk into a bar and you were in uniform, you might be able to buy the first drink, and then the rest of the drinks were on the house. Somebody was buying them, and somebody was buying a lot of booze because we found out later on that this was a well-planned program. Because this is what they were trying to do--they were trying to see how many of the Americans that they could get drunk. In other words, the more that they could get drunk, the better. The less amount would get back to their units, see. This was actually sabotage at work. In other words, this is my own opinion because they were basically getting our personnel "loaded"; they were taking advantage of an unsuspecting GI. The women themselves didn't have any use for us as far as dating the Americans. This is a different situation. In other words, they were speaking to them; they were being really friendly with them.

Let me go back a little bit to the fact that on the first of December, the Honolulu Advertiser. . . now this is the first time that we noticed this. . . I picked it up. I suppose our officers did the same thing. But in

the lower left-hand corner on the front page of the Honolulu Advertiser, there was a. . .I think it was either a white background with a black letter or black background with white lettering. I can't recall because it's been so many years ago, but anyway, each day that date changed--the first, the second, the third, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth--but each day it was the same except the Sunday morning when the background block was red with the white seven. Or was it the white background with the red seven? Anyway, it was a prescribed warning, we found out later on, for the enemy on the island to get underground--undercover. It was a warning to them, but maybe our intelligence picked it up. I don't know. We didn't know anything about it. But to us it was strange because this was put in the paper. We didn't know who put it in the paper or why it was being put in the paper until the bottom dropped out on Sunday morning. Then we found out that actually this was a warning to the Japanese people on the island to take cover.

Marcello: Let me go back and interject with a few questions here on the basis of what you've just said. As relations between the United States and Japan continued to worsen--and I'm sure that you could keep up with this through the newspapers and the radio and so on--did you ever feel that the Hawaiian Islands might be the target of a Japanese attack?

Sell: Well, basically we felt that the island itself was so well-fortified that it really wouldn't be feasible. In other words, this was my personal opinion now. We were under the impression that it was so well-guarded--with the Navy being there, with the Air Force being there, with the Army being there--and with it being so hard to actually get that close to it without visually being detected.

Well, this was proven that somebody down the line goofed because even though radar was in its infancy at the time, it did pick up these planes coming in. But at the same token, there were planes coming in from the United States which were B-17's. But from looking at the map and from the directions that we had, one set of planes was coming in from one direction, and the other was coming in from the other. According to the alert that was given, the planes that were picked up were, in my own opinion, not coming in from the West Coast. In other words, they were coming in from a different general direction. And also, there were a lot more blips on the screen than the total number of B-17's that were scheduled to come in to begin with. But evidently, they assumed that the operator at that time--he was new--that the individual may have goofed and gotten the wrong information, which was a possibility. But on the other hand, he did give the right information.

To go one step farther, we were in Schofield Barracks when they were bombing Kaneohe Naval Air Station and Bellows Field, which was on the other side of the island. They called in to alert the Hickam and Schofield Barracks. They said, "We're being bombed! We're being attacked over here!" This order was still ignored, because they said, "Aw, you're mistaken! It's impossible! There's no way that they could get in!" until they dropped the first bomb on Wheeler, and when they dive-bombed Wheeler, they came out of the strafing formation over Schofield.

Marcello: So in other words, you did feel relatively safe and secure there in Schofield at the time.

Sell: Right. We had every reason, you know, in the world to feel that way because had anyone personally paid any attention to any message or any warning, I don't see how, you know, that they could have gotten there. Because we had ample time to get our planes up. In fact, they even got the five little. . . at the time the only planes that we got up really, our fighter planes, were Lieutenant Taylor and Welch--the five that had set down at Haleiwa Beach, which was an emergency landing strip at the time. They were the only fighting planes that we had really gotten up off the ground into the air. Other than that, the Navy had gotten its PBY's up, and, of course, with the big, bulky PBY against

the faster Zero, they just didn't have a chance. I mean, there was no contest, you might say, as far as combat engagements go. The Zero could out-maneuver and out-fly it. It just was really, you might say, like knocking flies out of the sky because they just pounced on them, and that was all there was to it, period.

Marcello: When you thought of an individual Japanese, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind in that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Sell: Well, really and truly, this is a kind of a question that's hard to answer because basically they were a reserved type. In other words, they stuck within their own group, and if they'd speak, we'd speak. This is as far as it went. In other words, you'd say, "Good morning," and they'd say, "Good morning," you know, really. You had a working relationship with the ones that you worked with or that you knew on the island. They seemed like a very friendly and very congenial type of people. Now we had the 298th and 299th Infantry National Guard units which were composed of a lot of their personnel during the maneuvers because they were always involved in the maneuvers with us. They seemed to be a very congenial type. Now whether this was a camouflaged front that they were putting on or whether it was their natural, normal way, it's hard to say. Basically, I couldn't believe it, really, you know, that it was happening

until the morning of the attack which hit Schofield. We heard the explosions; we heard the rumbling; and we went outside and looked up, and you could see the pilots. That's how low they were. One of my non-commissioned officers made the remark, "Yeah, there they are. The Marines are camouflaging their planes again. We're having another sham-battle." Well, prior to that was numerous times when the Marine Corps would sneak in, and they would drop what we called "flour sack bombs," you know, to simulate or mark the area where the bomb was supposed to hit and so forth and so on. We thought this was what was actually taking place.

Marcello: Okay, let's back up here a little bit because I hope to lead up to that particular portion. Let's get back to the maneuvers again. Now you mentioned that the order had come down while you were in the field that 10 per cent of the men would be allowed to have liberty on Saturday morning.

Sell: Right. Saturday 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Marcello: Okay, and in the meantime, all the units had been called out of the field and back to Schofield Barracks, but your equipment and so on was still out there in the field.

Sell: It was still in the field. There were guards guarding it. In other words, a skeleton crew was kept there to maintain the equipment, see.

Marcello: Okay, so you come in from the field, and then on Saturday morning that 10 per cent goes on liberty. I would assume that at six o'clock p.m. on Saturday evening the other 90 per cent go on liberty.

Sell: Right. That's right. There wasn't very many people left in the area.

Marcello: So there are 10 per cent of the people back on the base, you might say then.

Sell: Just about.

Marcello: Okay, let's pick up the story from this point then, Mr. Sell. I want you to reconstruct it in as much detail as you can remember what happened from the time you came in from the field until all hell broke loose on Sunday morning. In other words, I want you to tell me what you did on Saturday, and then we'll lead into Sunday.

Sell: All right. We came back from the field back into Schofield, and I can't remember the exact time, but it'd seem like it was, oh, say mid-afternoon--somewhere along in around one or two o'clock.

Marcello: When was the last time you'd had liberty?

Sell: Well, actually, we'd been in the field for about two weeks.

Marcello: Okay, it had been quite awhile.

Sell: Right. It had been quite awhile. It had been about two weeks before we had actually. . . for the first time that

we'd gone that long, where usually you'd go two or three nights, and then you'd be back in again, see. But basically, they were in the field on these maneuvers. We had stuck in there, and we were trying to figure out what was going on. The kids had gotten paid on the first of the month, as I said before, and they were wondering what they were going to do with their money. A lot of them were gambling, and a lot of them were trying to get money orders and get it in a bank or mail it home or whatever they normally did with their money.

Marcello: And I assume that you were living on field rations and so on out there.

Sell: Right. We were on field rations at tht time.

Marcello: So what I'm leading up to is--given the conditions under which you were living in the field and given the fact that you weren't getting your normal liberty routine, people would have probably been ready to bust loose on Saturday.

Sell: That's right. That's exactly right. They were primed and ready to go.

Marcello: And they had a lot of money.

Sell: They had a lot of money. This is exactly what they did. When they hit the barracks, the first thing they wanted to know was, "When can we go?" "Well, just as soon as you get your gear put up--what you brought with you--get

it checked in, make sure that it's available where you can get hold of it, so when you come back off pass, you can get back into it. And be back at six o'clock tonight." Boy, they took off! I mean, that place was empty in five minutes, really.

We say in our unit at that time--now I'm not sure--we had in the neighborhood of 400 or maybe 450 officers and enlisted personnel in our 25th Medical Battalion, which was the whole unit itself. I would say that with the exception of the officers, the non-commissioned officers, mess sergeant, supply sergeant, charge of quarters, transportation sergeants--that was it. They were the last ones, and probably the only reason they were because they couldn't get away because they had to make sure the equipment and stuff was put away. Everybody else had taken off.

Marcello: Now in your own case, you were still at the barracks.

Sell: I was still in the barracks. In fact, we went to the mess hall, and we ate in the mess hall that evening. Somebody said, "Well, does anybody have any idea what we're going to do tonight?" I said, "Well, does anyone have any suggestions?" About that time the phone rang, and there was. . . I wish I could think of the chief petty officer, but it was a friend of ours from Aiea that was over in the NCO Club at Wheeler, and they were having a dance that night for a friend

of his who was being rotated back to the States Sunday morning. He called up and wanted to know if we'd like to come over to the club and spend the evening with them and then take them to the ship and then come on back to the barracks. I said, "No reason why not!"

So this is exactly what we did. We just showered and changed clothes and slipped into just trousers and aloha shirt and went over to the NCO Club because we weren't really planning on going anywhere or doing anything exciting with the exception of maybe saying aloha to the guy that was going back to the States. Sure enough, we get over to the club, and we sat there and we had, oh, I guess a couple of beers was the most that we drank because for one thing, I was on duty and I wasn't going to participate in too much of the party because of the fact that I was subject to call and we were subject to be called back in the field at any time. So I more or less kind of made sure that I drank coffee the biggest part of the evening. So I guess along about eleven o'clock that night, they decided, "Well, if we're going to get these guys aboard ship, let's get rolling. Let's get going so we can get back and get to bed and get some sleep." We left Wheeler Field, and we drove all the way down to Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: About how far was this and how long would it take?

Sell: I'm just trying to estimate the distance. I can't remember the exact distance, but it seems like it was somewhere in the neighborhood of forty-five minutes to an hour, I would say, maybe maximum time. We took them down--one of the sergeants had a car--and we took them down and dropped them off. In fact, we went aboard the Mariposa. He was going back on the Mariposa. We put the guy aboard it and said goodbye to him. In fact, we tried to talk him into extending a little longer and staying over there with us. He said, "No." He'd already extended twice, and that was long enough. He was going to go back to the States and try the States again for a while.

We dropped him off there, and then. . .I think it was our sergeant-major, I believe it was, that said, "Hey, while we're here, why don't we stop by one of the bars and just see what's going on and have a quick drink and then go on back to Schofield?" So I can't remember whether it was the. . .I'm trying to think of the name of the bar. . .but it was one of the more popular ones at that time, and, anyway, we went into it, and it was just packed. I mean, it was just jam-packed. Just by walking into it and looking around, you could just see that personnel were just really "getting with it." In other words, they were really getting "bent out of shape."

Marcello: Now was this both Army and Navy personnel?

Sell: Army, Navy, Marine Corps--the whole works. I mean, they were just. . .everybody was enjoying. . . it was just a social evening, you know. All the beer--everytime you turned around somebody was handing you a glass of beer, you know. Of course, I set mine down. I didn't drink, and I still don't drink, but just occasionally to be sociable, I had a beer or two at the club prior to going down there.

Marcello: Now let me ask you this. At this time, did you personally observe any of the Japanese buying drinks for the Americans?

Sell: Definitely! Definitely! They were sitting at the bar; they were at the tables; the waitresses were coming around with their trays just full "Compliments of Mr. So-and-So," you know. You'd look around over there, and there were Japanese grinning, you know, and bowing--just as a cordial invitation. In other words, "Enjoy yourself," you know. Of course, at the time, I thought, "Well, gee whiz. This is strange." Personally, it was my own opinion, you know, but I didn't think anything more about it. I just said, "Well, gee. Well, I guess maybe they're celebrating--have a reason to celebrate," you know. We stayed there maybe. . . I'd say. . . half an hour at the longest. We took our time.

We got back into Schofield. One of the guys said,

"Look, I'm gonna go ahead and take a shower now because in the morning when we get up, it's going to be a madhouse getting these guys awake so that these other guys can go on pass." By the time we got back in . . . we must have gotten back in around four o'clock in the morning. Well, outside of the CQ, there wasn't anybody in the barracks (chuckle). It was empty, so I said, "Well, we don't have anybody to worry about waking up," so we went over to the mess hall.

Marcello: In other words, you just didn't go to bed that night.

Sell: We just didn't go to bed, you know. We went over to the mess hall, and the mess sergeant, the assistant mess sergeant, the cooks, and the KP's were starting their morning chores. The mess sergeant said, "Come on, let's have some coffee." So we sat down there. We were sitting just more or less "batting the breeze," discussing what we thought was going to happen in getting these guys in and getting those guys out and wondering if they'd get back in because of the drinking that was going on, you know.

We were sitting in the mess hall, and we heard this vibration. Of course, we'd been there, oh, by that time a couple of hours. It was, I'd say, around six-thirty--somewhere in that vicinity. Of course, you know how your

mess hall tables are--your coffee cups, your salt and pepper shakers. We saw the salt and pepper shakers vibrating across the table. Of course, we had had, prior to that, one or two tremors and a few earthquakes over there, but nothing big, or Mauna Loa erupting, and that was about the size of it. Somebody said, "Oh, I guess we're getting an earthquake. It wounds like an earthquake," you know. They kept getting louder and louder, and pretty soon somebody came running and said, "Hey, they're having an awful explosion over here at Wheeler!"

Marcello: Wheeler is how far away from you?

Sell: Well, Wheeler was just up the post from Schofield Barracks, where we were at. About that time we ran out on the outside, and some of the men that were in the barracks were starting to line up in the chow line. In other words, they were more or less out in front of the consolidated mess hall where we were at at the time. We saw the flashes from the Zeros coming toward us, but we didn't think anything of it. We said, "What's going on here? I thought the maneuvers were called off for the weekend! We're not supposed to be having maneuvers now!" This guy banked his plane and looked down and grinned and actually waved at us.

Marcello: How low was he?

Sell: You could see him. I would say tree top height.

Marcello: What did he look like?

Sell: Well, it's hard to say, you know, because they were going by so fast. But here he had his goggles up on top of his little cap and was looking down over the side out of his plane and grinning. We couldn't figure it out. I mean, we were actually tongue-tied, really, you know. Because here are these Zero markings so bright and plain on the wings and the tail of the aircraft. Somebody said, "There the Marines are. Their planes are camouflaged again." They were going to pull another one of their surprises, which they were real good at. About that time, one came in from the other side and . . .

Marcello: Now from what direction did the first plane come?

Sell: Well, actually, this is what I'm trying to give you--a direction. In other words, our consolidated mess hall was in this angle here (gesture), and we were standing here (gesture). The planes were coming in the way we're facing now. That would be east and west, wouldn't it? Basically, this is what . . . I may be wrong on the directions from the terrain there, but they came in on a straight approach. Because what they had done was that they had come in over Kole Kole Pass and dive-bombed in dive-bomb formation at Wheeler, pulled out of their dive, and come over Schofield

strafing. This is what we were seeing.

The second plane came over. We saw the flames and the firing, and then we saw the bullets hitting the ground, and we saw these guys falling.

Marcello: Now about how far away was this from where you were?

Sell: About fifty feet, maximum. About fifty feet. We walked over there and looked at the guy, and I said, "Okay, come on. You can quit clowning now. The planes have gone. The maneuver's over with."

Marcello: The first plane did not fire at all?

Sell: No, it did not fire at all at us. He just more or less . . . either was empty or was waiting for a better chance coming back around. He was more or less observing and reporting by radio, basically, to the planes behind him. But the second plane. . . when it strafed and hit the personnel that was standing out in the chow line, we went over and looked. I just took my foot to push the guy, and I said, "Okay, come on. You can get up now." Well, when I pushed him, he had been cut right half in two.

That's when we got sick, really. Just the thoughts, you know. . . we were horrified. We said, "Gee whiz! This is not play! This is real!"

Here they were coming back, so we just made a dive. There were ambulances parked. . .we must have had about

fifty brand spanking new ambulances that had just arrived from the States while we were in the field on maneuvers. They were parked in the parking lot and still had the break-in oil in them and weren't even serviced or anything. We just made a dive under the ambulances. Well, they were strafing. They hit the ambulances; they set the ambulances on fire. We were lucky because none of us got hit at the time. But there must have been at least a dozen of us, it seemed like, under the one ambulance, and there was room for a few more. But we crawled out from under there, and we got in the barracks. We said, "Look, we gotta get hold of somebody here because we're under fire!"

Marcello: In the meantime, were these guys that had originally been strafed dead?

Sell: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Definitely. Because we ran over there, and there wasn't anything we could do for those guys. What we tried to do was get everybody alerted, and they said, "Oh, you guys! You've gotta be kidding!" you know.

About that time they dropped the 500-pounder on our mess hall. It was just lucky that it hit at the far end of the mess hall which was empty. Had it been a normal morning where the personnel would have been in the mess hall, there would have been between 400 and 500 personnel in the mess hall at that time. So here the mess hall went,

see. Well, then everybody started running out.

So I finally got hold of headquarters and tried to get hold of headquarters and find out what the instructions were. Well, we had previously planned a procedure that we would follow in the event of alert or anything--get hold of our personnel; get in contact with our personnel; get as many of them as you can back in the field. Well, gee whiz, there was nobody to get back in the field because most of them were all downtown. So they tried to get vehicles. . .they tried to get them started, but they were burning.

The Japs had it so well-planned that they came on the base earlier with milk trucks. In the milk trucks--in the back-end of them where the military police or air police normally checked them--they had cartons of milk all right. But when the attack had started, they had pulled up to the mess hall like they normally did, but they just kicked the back end of the crates out and here sitting in the back of the vehicle were machine guns with crews mounted in the back-end of the trucks. As the personnel started running, they opened fire, see, and they caught a lot of our personnel in a cross-fire.

Well, here the ammunition and stuff was locked up in the supply rooms. We tried to get the supply sergeant to

open the supply room. "Well, look, I don't have the authority! I can't open it up until I get the authority!" Well, here we could have threw rocks at them, if we had had rocks. That's how low they were. We were at their mercy because we had nothing--basically nothing--to return fire with. To begin with, we were a non-combatant--medical department--to begin with, see. Here they were strafing Schofield Hospital; they were strafing in the area of the old 11th Medical Brigade or Regiment.

We had a time trying to get our crews together. We finally managed to get. . . I think it must have been about a dozen ambulances. So they were calling for ambulances at Wheeler; they were calling for ambulances at Hickam; they were calling for them at Schofield and at Tripler. Tripler was a big hospital, but they needed assistance out of Aiea and out of Hickam Field. So we tried to split them up and head them into all directions, see. Now the ambulance this other sergeant and I got into, we took off. We made it. We got down as far as Hickam Field.

Marcello: In the meantime, did you come under any strafing or anything?

Sell: Yes, definitely! Going on Kamehameha Highway--actually going into Honolulu itself--we had to abandon the vehicle about four times because of attacks from the air. The ambulances were well-marked because they were with the old

white background with the big American red cross on the vehicles. There's no doubt about it that they couldn't help but see them. We came under fire there. We finally made it.

We reported then to Tripler. They said, "Okay, now the thing of it is, we've got hundreds of casualties at Aiea. We're gonna have to get these people in here somehow. Why don't you get a detail, get down there, and see if you can start evacuating casualties." So I said, "What detail?" "Well, grab anybody you can get hold of." So we tried to get as many of our personnel and get down there.

Well, here they were pulling sailors out of the burning water, covered with oil and grease, some of them burned beyond recognition. In other words, it wasn't a pleasant sight. But at the time, you didn't have time to think, you know. You just thought of one thing--getting these people back to the hospital.

I would say in ten minutes time, the morgue was filled at Tripler. The hospital was filled. So they said, "Well, start going to the high schools. Use the high schools for temporary morgues. Use the high schools for temporary hospitals--anything that you can get in there." So we started just tearing the desks and all out to make room so that we can get the litters in, and the ones that were

alive, we tried to treat.

Well, the only thing that we had, like I said, were the medical kits that we carried--the sulfanilamide which we had to sprinkle in the wounds. Most of the personnel were hard to identify for the fact that, although each one of us had dog tags, most of them didn't have them on, or they had them on but they had them in their pockets.

Like, for example, I worked between Aiea and Hickam Field. The Air Corps personnel, we'd walk into the barracks, and you'd find bodies laying in the bunks just like they were. . . with the funny papers over them on a typical Sunday morning, like they were reading the paper, but every bone in their body was broken. It was just from concussion. Wall lockers knocked over, footlockers. The roofs and buildings were burning.

We looked for identification. Most of them were in their shorts. Unless they had a ring or unless they had an arm bracelet or unless they had their ID on, you didn't know who was who because here they were blown out in the middle of the floor, see. It made it really hard to try to identify them because we had EMT tags, which were the emergency treatment tags, that we tried to mark them with if we could find out. The ones that had billfolds on and that we could get to their identification were real easy

to mark and to get identification. But at that time, they had just come out with the. . . I think they refer to them as addressograph machines now, but they had the little gadget you could use for dog tags and impress the EMT tag with this, you see. The EMT is a medical treatment card is what it is. It's just a long card, that had the patient's name, diagnosis, injury, what was wrong with him, what you did for him, so forth and so on. It had a big red cross on the back-end of it showing that he was a casualty.

Oh, also, too, if the guy was wounded, where was his wound? If you gave him a tetanus shot, how much? In other words, a normal standard dose was 1/2 cc injection. Of course, we had this, but we didn't have disposable syringes. We didn't have a facility to boil our syringes in, you know. You just couldn't use the same syringe over and over on different individuals withouth the possibility of contamination, see. So it was quite a problem. What we did, then, was try to get them to the hospital as quick as possible where they could get proper care.

Well, it didn't take long until most of the hospitals were just overcrowded. In fact, they took over the civilian hospitals as well. Actually, I worked there for three days--three solid days--between Hickam Field and Aiea and

Tripler General Hospital--the old Tripler--just hauling patients back and forth. Of course, we had DOA's that went to one area and the injured that went into another area. Of course, again, it was kind of hectic, because they were trying to take the ones that they could get treated in and back to duty first. They'd try to get you to bring them in in that order. Well, that was almost an impossibility because you just didn't have the people; you didn't have the personnel, the equipment, you know, to separate them. So we just actually bandaged them and treated them the best way we could.

The next thing that came--the fact that we ran out of bandages. It didn't take long to run out of bandages. So the only other thing left to use was sheets. So we just started ripping up sheets and making our own bandages out of sheets. Like you say, when you haven't got it, you just have to improvise, and that's basically what we were trying to do.

But the big thing, I think, was the fact that there was so much mass confusion. This, I think, caused 90 per cent of the slowdown. In other words, if you are organized, then you can perform a lot better in any kind of disaster or emergency that comes up or if you have a planned program that you can follow or some outline or something that you can go by rather than trying to have

forty people trying to do this or do something, you know, and nobody really getting anything worthwhile accomplished. Yet you're dealing with lives; you're not working with automobiles or some other source that doesn't. . . in other words, where you have a lot of time. Where with a human being, you just don't have that time. You have to really get with it, you know, to keep from losing a life. You have to work with speed, yet at the same time, work with confidence, too, to make sure that you're doing the right thing. Because if you don't know what you're doing, it's far better to leave the patient alone because you can do more damage than you can do good.

Marcello: You brought up a very interesting point here when you mentioned that the general reaction seemed to be one of confusion. It seems to me that from this standpoint the Army and the Air Corps was at a certain disadvantage in contrast with the Navy. On the ships, when general quarters was sounded, every sailor knew precisely where he was supposed to go. He had a battle station. And, of course, that wasn't the case with the Army or the Air Corps, and really, in many ways, maybe it shouldn't have been because the functions were so much different and so on.

Sell: Right. Right. Well, actually, there again, too, they would, I think, have had a little better organized procedure had

we been in the field in our positions because there each individual knew and had a pre-assigned position. He knew what he was supposed to do. But here we were in Schofield; our area was actually at Walsh's Farm. Actually, it's a macadamia nut farm. This was our pre-designated area. This is where our main equipment was at.

Marcello: How far was this from Schofield?

Sell: That was a good hour's drive from Schofield, see. Here we were trying to get to that unit to get the equipment and to get down to Schofield. The roads were cut off; there was so much traffic on the roads; they were not letting anything through.

Again, the Japanese had this also in mind because they had made sure that the roads were being blocked, that traffic was being slowed up as much as possible, that the congestion was kept going, and that the confusion was kept at a maximum.

Because they based their theory on surprise, and, believe me, I'll have to give them 100 per cent credit for that. They really did get them by surprise because it really took everybody. . . I'm speaking of the lower echelon. Now the high echelon. . .maybe they knew what was going on, but if they did, the lack of communication down to the lower echelon. . .we never got it. In other words, if the

message was sent, we never received it. Because here we were trying to get in touch with our CO's. With our telephone lines, certain areas had priority; we couldn't call here and we couldn't call there. We needed assistance; we needed supplies. We were trying to get in touch with Tripler to send down. . .what they were doing was sending bales and bales and bales of blankets out--trying to get them to us. But where were they at? In other words, where were they sending them?

This was the big thing. We didn't have any really central distribution point as to where you could go to get anything. We did have in the field where our unit was stationed, but we weren't at that particular area. Actually, I was down working between Hickam and Aiea when I was supposed to have been with the unit over on Walsh's Farm. That was where the field hospital was actually set up.

Finally, I'd say by Sunday night, things had kind of or sort of come to a. . . oh, it wasn't a standstill, but it was kind of a sort of a crawl, you might say. Things were a little better organized.

And it was a blessing--the fact that they didn't send the troops. If they had have sent troops with them, I tell you, the stevedores would have tied the ships up

because we were at their mercy. I mean, we didn't have a thing that would stop them from coming in. Everything, in other words, was in their favor. In other words, we were at a disadvantage because they had hit everything. We had nothing left afloat; we had no aircraft left with the exception of maybe the few like Taylor and Welch who had landed over at Haleiwa Beach. The big stuff was all burning because they caught it wing tip to wing tip at Hickam, at Bellows, and at Kaneohe Naval Air Station--at the different bases, see. It was the same thing at the hospital. In no time at all, at Schofield we evacuated as many casualties over as we could, and then they kept hollering, "Get those medical battalions down here! Get these ambulances down here!" Our ambulances--the ones that were running--were dispersed. We just didn't have anymore to send.

Marcello: Everybody had an emergency case (chuckle).

Sell: Right. Right. It was really a day that, I think, we could well learn a lesson from. It's a shame that it happened, but in the long run, I think we're much better prepared. I think we're much better organized now--not only in case of war, but national emergencies. They have plans worked out now which a lot of people maybe don't believe in them. They think, "Well, gee. This don't

apply to me." It always applies to the other fellow. But you never know. You never know when this is going to come in handy. This is the thing that I kind of sort of am in favor of now--the American Red Cross. I give them credit--a lot of credit--for the fact that they're teaching these first-aid classes because you never know. The meaning of the word "first-aid". . . this could happen in a home as well as it can on a highway.

The big thing is the number of people whose lives can be saved because of someone that just maybe knows basic first-aid that can help someone. Oh, it's nothing to stand around and talk about it and brag and this and that, you know. But when it really comes down to it, can you do it? Can you do it under pressure? There's a big difference. A lot of people don't realize this, you know. They'll say. . . I've taught a lot of first-aid classes, and they say, "Well, what if we panic? What if we get scared?" Well, the big thing is this--try not to think of the individual, but think of what you're doing. Get the job done first. If the patient stops breathing, give him breathing; if he's bleeding profusely, stop the bleeding. Then if you want to pass out, by my guest. Go ahead and pass out because the mission that you have started out has been completed.

A lot of people will say, "Well, gee. What do I want with first-aid? What am I gonna do?" Everyday in workshops, power plants--I'm sure at the university--you'll find that somebody somewhere down the line has either--even as far as taking a splinter out--has helped somebody. In other words, where you can prevent an infection or where you can relieve pain, I think you have accomplished. . . what we set out to do, basically, is to relieve pain--make the patient comfortable until a doctor can arrive or proper professional help can arrive. Basically, I think this is what. . .I think we were lax; I think we didn't have enough people trained that morning of the December 7th attack. I think that the ones that were there did a tremendous job. I mean, they did things that. . .I know I personally did things I didn't think I could do. I mean, I don't do an awful lot. . . maybe if I helped save one life, I felt like that I accomplished something.

But basically, to help someone that's in pain or to knowingly relieve pain or to assist someone, you get self-satisfaction there, to me, you don't get like when you go out and rapair somebody's flat. I mean, the individual appreciates it, you know. But you take, for an example, a hurt child. If you go out and you don't do a thing but comfort that child, console it, and calm it down, that's

90 per cent of the battle right there--to get that patient's confidence. Because from there on in, it's a matter of keeping him comfortable, keeping him quiet, waiting for the doctor to get there, and getting professional help.

A lot of people just don't, I guess, take the time. They say, "Aw, Jesus, it doesn't involve me. I'll never get hurt," or "I won't be in an area where I may have to give first-aid." You never know. I mean, a person has no idea when or where something might happen.

Marcello: Now while the raid was taking place, were the men gradually coming back onto the base and making themselves useful?

Sell: Yes, yes, yes. Definitely. They were hitchhiking; they were confiscating taxicabs; they were getting vehicles, buses, trucks--anyway that they could get in. I tell you, it didn't take long to sober them. By the time that they left Honolulu, they might have been drunk, but by the time that they reached Schofield or they reached their destination, they were pretty well sober. Because all you had to do was look around and take one look, and it kind of sobered you up. It was a hard, rude awakening, but it sobered a lot of people up in a big hurry. It definitely let them know that this was not a game--that this was the "real McCoy."

People started coming in, and boy, they started pitching in. The tragic thing was. . . like for an example, you

take your machine gunners. I treated several of them that had burns on their arms because for the gun itself they didn't have the water jacket that went with it. They were just firing the gun--laying it across their arm and firing it. After 200 or 300 rounds, that thing gets red hot, and they had good third-degree burns on their arms because of the fact that they couldn't get to a tripod to mount their gun on because most of the equipment was in supply and they didn't have orders.

A lot of them just started jerking the locks off the wall and getting to the ammunition. Actually, while we were in our own area in the quadrangle there at the 25th Division mess hall, the military police were firing at them with .45's. That's how low they were. That's all they had. They didn't have anything else because all the ammunition--all the hard stuff--was turned in. The guys had their rifles, but they were empty; they had their .45's, but they were empty. They didn't have the ammo. You can't do an awful lot with an empty gun.

Marcello: Describe what damage had been done to the hospital there at Schofield Barracks.

Sell: Well, actually, we didn't get too close to the hospital to see what damage had been done, other than the fact that we could see part of a wing burning, so it had evidently been hit and strafed.

Marcello: But you actually did not get into the hospital?

Sell: No. No, we didn't get over. . . basically, see, when we split and dispersed our vehicles, we just sent them in every direction--the few that we had. We just split up, and we went to Hickam to work between Aiea and Hickam. I sent two personnel with one ambulance down to Wheeler. A couple went over to Schofield. I think we got a total of fifty vehicles moving. The rest of them were all in the field, and eventually they got them all going as soon as our doctors and our staff got back together again.

Another thing, too, which was confusing, was that you had to watch because the radio was the only source of information, and it was broadcasting for all the personnel to report back immediately to their organization. All right, where was their organization at? Because the ones at Schofield have already been given orders to move back out into the field, so here a lot of the personnel were going to Schofield when they should have gone back to their unit's original destination out in the field. It just delayed the personnel getting back. In fact, by Monday morning they were still coming in. Actually, I'd say, by midday Monday there were still personnel coming in.

In fact, several of ours. . .I didn't show up at the unit for three days because we were tied up between Hickam

and Aiea for three days just working bodies and personnel. And then after we got to Tripler, they were trying to set up an identification section and were trying to get as much information on the bodies and on the patients as they possibly could. Normally, when you make out this emergency medical tag, it's made out in duplicate copies. In other words, you have one that goes with the patient and one copy you retain for the files, see. Well, when you're in a big hurry like that, there was such incidents as even forgetting the patient's name. You had the identification, see, but you forgot to write his name down, or you forgot to write his serial number at that time--now it's gone to social security number, see--or any identification marks. In other words, did he have a tatoo? Did he have an appendix scar? Were there any visible scars? In other words, you needed a description because the individual themselves, when you saw them, they might have still been in a position where you could have made better identification because the longer you wait, the harder it is to make positive identification, see, other than maybe by dental work or by fingerprints. For some of these individuals, you'd find. . .maybe they were just arms or maybe they were just legs, hands, fingers. You just had kind of a pile and tried to match the parts belonging to the individuals, which was kind of a hard thing to do.

Basically, we weren't too concerned with that so much as the other crews were. We were trying to get the injured in and get them taken care of. We brought in. . .oh, gee, I don't know how many ambulance loads of people--we alone, just Stater and myself. Sergeant Stater--he and I were working together. Just between the two of us, it's hard to say actually how many casualties we hauled on all the vehicles.

Anything that would move that they could put a casualty on or a patient on--they were utilizing and were hauling them into the hospital. They took over _____ High School, Roosevelt High School. . .I was thinking of the name of the college. . .anyway, they took it over and converted it to a temporary hospital and morgue facility.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were working for three straight days. Was this without any sleep or what?

Sell: Straight through, right--straight through. You'd grab a wink or two, you know. You'd get a half an hour if there was a lull or something like that. The thing that we were trying to do was to get all the injured out first, and then we got those taken care of. We'd treat them and get them maybe set over in this area over in here (gesture). Then there would be vehicles coming and picking them up and taking them to the hospitals, see.

All right, then we'd go around and maybe they'd have DOA's--in other words, like sailors, soldiers, airmen--these people. Maybe there were parts missing--in other words, which were in most cases. Or maybe they were not positively identified, see. So you would have to kind of sort of hold back before you could move them because you wanted to make sure you got the right person, you know. A lot of them were identifiable by the fact that they were in uniforms.

But the ones that were hard to identify were the ones that. . .after things kind of or sort of calmed down, they had us to go through the barracks, and you'd go through the barracks, and you'd find them laying in bed and in their shorts, see. And maybe this was all they had on. Maybe they had no head, or maybe part of their torso was missing. Okay, you'd find them scattered all over the barracks, see. Well, you didn't know what belonged to who or who belonged to what. Almost all of them were dead. We didn't find. . .I think we went to three barracks that we actually found some survivors that were left alive. The rest of them were just nothing. In other words, they were killed by concussion, and almost every bone in their body was broken. Well, these are the ones that. . . like if they had dog tags, we were fine, or if they had something laying close by, like a letter or a footlocker or something

like that, but usually when you went in, you'd find stuff was turned over on top of one another. In other words, it was just a big mess. So you'd kind of have to sift through. In other words, you were playing Chinese checkers more or less--trying to match this guy with this part making sure that you got everything together where really, you know, the right part belonged to the right person.

Marcello: Did you get a chance to observe the damage that had been done down at Pearl Harbor?

Sell: Not for a while. In other words, there was so much burning and so much oil and smoke and all going on. You were in and out of it, but you didn't really visualize what really was happening. Actually, the closest I come to really seeing what was going on outside of being there was watching the movie "Tora! Tora! Tora!" In other words, to me that was the closest thing in actuality to what happened. Because we were busy. You didn't have time to really look around too much, you know, to see what was going on.

Marcello: In other words, you know what your function is, and you don't have a chance to see the "big picture," so to speak.

Sell: That's right. That's right. So really to give you a complete vision of what happened over there, you know, it's hard to visualize. Just like at Hangar 17 at Hickam Field is where. . . oh, you might go back. . .I don't know what

edition it was, but I think either Look or Life magazine used it as a cover story--the picture of an ambulance on top of a hangar. That was one of our ambulances that was from our battalion. They had been treating the personnel in the hangar, and evidently they dropped at least a 500-pounder of 1,000-pounder and just blew it. I mean, the whole ambulance was on top of the hangar, and the hangar was burning, you know. This was just something that. . . I don't know how close we were to it at the time because of the continuous noise, the continuous bombs going off, explosions from the burning ships, the oil, the gasoline, fuel, and stuff like that.

It was really a continuous turmoil, you know. If you could just get the sounds, if someone had had a microphone where he could pick up the sounds of that and listen to them, it would just be really a mass of confusion because you have a multiple of different sounds all coming in from different directions. This basically was what it was all about. You kind of sort of worked in that area.

Marcello: I assume you had to drive under black-out conditions that night.

Sell: Oh, yes. Definitely.

Marcello: I assume this could be a rather harrowing experience.

Sell: It really was, I tell you. The big thing of it was that

you have two little bitty pin lights on those old field ambulances, and you couldn't even see those. You'd have to strike a match to see whether those were burning or not. This is what you were driving by.

The orders were that nobody was supposed to be out at night. The MP's, I guess, the guards, and the personnel had authority to challenge and stop everybody. Well, they had certain passwords that they were using, see. Well, okay, by the time we get to Tripler, they would tell us one password. Well, by the time we would get to Hickam Field or be going back to Aiea or somewhere else, it completely changed. So we had a time trying to get through. It would take two or three hours to get from Tripler to back to where you were going, especially at night. I'd say you couldn't make a block without somebody stopping you, checking your ambulance, looking in, seeing what you got, asking for positive identification, and what you're doing out this time of night. I said, "If we didn't have to be out here, we certainly wouldn't be out here," you know. But the thing of it was--they had their orders. We had to try to get back and forth to get our personnel and our casualties in.

I would say that there were casualties that were still being brought in--back and forth--a good two weeks following that morning. Of course, there were bodies that had

evidently been under debris that had kind of worked loose and come up to the top, and also in the debris in the barracks there that we had missed or that had very easily missed and all.

Marcello: Did you have much of an appetite during those days that followed?

Sell: No. As a matter of fact, to this day I have a little difficulty with liver because of the burnt flesh. You know, I look at a piece of liver, and immediately my mind goes back to the burnt bodies, you know. Maybe it's a psychological thing, but I just don't care for liver, in other words. That's just me personally, you know, but it reminds me too much of the burnt individuals that we'd seen. A lot of them--in fact, every one of them, especially the Navy personnel and the Air Force personnel in the hangars and around the Aiea area in there--the burnt cases were just burnt way beyond recognition, you know. Maybe you'd just find portions of the body that was left. Some of them--I would imagine the ones that were close to the center of intensive heat--were just completely cremated. There was just no way in the world that you could identify them, you know, because the heat was so intense.

This was another thing. They were trying to put the fires out and get them under control. People were screaming. They were throwing grappling hooks into the bay there at

Aiea trying to pull the sailors out. There were people swimming around with oil in their face--blinded, you know --and a lot of them were blinded probably by the flash itself, some temporarily and some of them maybe permanently.

These were just some of the visual sights that were unpleasant, but they were the things that were really noticeable, you know, that will remain with you, I guess, as long as I live--the sights that you saw. It's kind of a sad thing when you think about it.

Like myself, I was very lucky. Actually, the only serious thing I got out of it was a bomb blast in this ear. I'm hard of hearing in this ear, which was caused by the bomb blast--the damage to it. I can sit at a certain angle, and, like, the telephone will ring, and I don't even hear it. It's not that I try to ignore it. In other words, I just don't hear it, period.

Marcello: How did your attitude toward the Japanese change in the immediate aftermath of the attack?

Sell: Well, it took me a long time, really--a long, long, long time. . .of course, the down-to-earth type of Japanese soldier is just like myself. We were trained to carry out orders. In other words, we were professional soldiers. This is what we were in service for. But what really got me was the negotiation that was going on prior to this

thing and the assurance. . . in other words, "Oh, we're not gonna. . .this is gonna be peacefully settled." While the negotiations were going on, see, the bottom drops out. This is what I think kind of sort of made me dislike them so much--was the fact that the sneaky way that they went about it.

And then, also, after we left Pearl Harbor and we were going up into Guadalcanal and Munda and New Georgia and Bougainville and in there, we found out how some of our casualties and personnel had been treated. This to me. . .I don't think a person in his right mind. . .I think that they must have been sedated or must have been on drugs or something to do the things that they did. Because I don't see how any human being in his right mind. . .you know, it's one thing to kill a person, but to mutilate them, you know, and I mean really mutilate them, there's no need for this, you know. The way I look at something like this is--what really have you accomplished? I mean, the guy is a human being, you know. If he's the enemy, capture him. A life is a life, you know. Because a live prisoner can be more valuable than a dead one because there's a possibility of getting information out of him and this and that. But why kill one of them, or why mutilate one of them, you know? Just to be barbarous, I guess, is

the only thing that I can figure, you know, as the reason behind it.

Now I'm sure that some of our services didn't show too much leniency in that respect, either, I understand. But again, I was in the non-combatant type, and we were more or less trained to preserve life and to take care of life. This, again, is a different field altogether. Our thoughts and our way of thinking in the training is a little different, I guess, than from the way Marines are taught or the way they teach their personnel during their training. I understand that since World War II the technique of hand-to-hand combat has completely changed compared to what it was when we were actually in World War II. Now it's a new field all of its own really. It's a specialized training course. To even survive the main object of jungle fighting. . .not only from the hazard of elements of the insects, the snakes, the varmints that are there beside the enemy. Because the enemy itself can do enough damage, and you've got your elements right along with it. So you have to really be a lot tougher, I guess, than when we were being trained, you know.

Marcello: Mr. Sell, there's one last question that I have, and I should have asked this much earlier. What was the weather like that day?

Sell: You know, it was a beautiful, clear day. In other words, from where we were at in Schofield, you know, the sun was up. It was just a typical beautiful type of a Sunday morning you'd like to get up to if you want to go play golf. It was ideal. The weather wasn't too hot; it wasn't too cold; it wasn't raining. Basically, at Schofield that morning, where we were at, you could see clearly. Obviously, everything was in their favor because everything was so visible, you know. Usually, over there prior to that, you'd have rain or rain squalls or rain showers. But at that particular time--that early in the morning--it was just a beautiful, clear, sunny morning until the bottom dropped out.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Snell, I don't have any further questions. Is there anything else you would like to add and get as a part of the record?

Sell: No, I think that pretty much covers everything, as far as I can remember.

Marcello: Well, I want to thank you very much for taking time to talk with me this morning. You've said a lot of very important and, I think, valuable things. I think scholars are going to get a great deal of value out of this when they use it to write about Pearl Harbor.

Sell: I hope if in any way--any small way--that I might be able to help someone to understand what happened that day a lot

better, I think it's all worthwhile. I think you're doing a tremendous job getting this together and getting it out because, like you say, it's a thing that can remain around for a long time, or it can just up and die. I think it's being handled properly, and I think you're going about it in the proper way. I tell you, it's hard to sit and visualize now what happened that many years ago. But when you stop and think and you get to talking, you kind of sort of wander back. Really, this is the first time that I really have concentrated that hard in a long, long time as to what really happened that morning. Like you say, there has been no one to talk to, really. Like a lot of us, we kind of sort of want to forget, you know, and get away from it and kind of sort of pray that it doesn't happen again. So this is my hope--the fact that at least someone will be able to derive some benefit from it.