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Phillip Willis
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Oral History Collection

Mr. Phillip Willis

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Date: February 18, 1974

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Phillip Willis for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on February 18, 1974, in Dallas, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Willis in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, during the Japanese attack there.

Mr. Willis, to begin this interview, why don't you very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education, your present occupation-- things of that nature. Just be very general and brief.

Mr. Willis: I was born August 2, 1918, in a little community called Peeltown. It was a rural route in Kaufman County, Texas. It was a little country store and school and church and a cotton gin. It was Scurry, Texas, Route 2, Kaufman County, which is just about forty miles southeast of Dallas near the Trinity. My father died when I was four.

My brother and I had to work our way through school. I was washing dishes and doing everything to get through school at North Texas State. I was visiting my brother over in Fort Worth, who was just out of Georgetown Law School in Washington and working in Fort Worth in September, 1939, when about four in the morning, we heard the extra newsboys out in the street shouting, "War Declared!" That was when France and England went to war with Germany.

So we went out on the curb and bought one of those extras and sat under the street lamp and read it. He said, "Well, son, I've got my law degree and a Reserve Commission in the Intelligence Corps. But you've got a year of college behind you, and you need to be thinking about it because I'm sure sooner or later with our allies England and France against Germany, that Hitler will take this world if we're not in it. So you better be thinking about it." I said, "Well, I already know. I want to be a pilot." I'd never been inside of an airplane. I just liked them.

So I went back to school and finished my sixty hours at North Texas, which you had to have to qualify for the flying cadets in the old Army Air Corps. As soon as I got my sixty hours, I came over to the old Air Corps

hangar out here at Love Field in Dallas. I'll never forget it. I went to this captain, and I said, "Well, sir, here's my sixty hours college credits. I want to take the physical and the examination to apply for the cadets. But I want to tell you ahead of time that I don't have enough math. I know what the Navy requires for their aviators in math, and I don't have that much math. But I've got my sixty hours." The captain said, "Well, son, I don't give a damn if you got sixty hours of trombone, as long as you've got sixty college credits."

Marcello: How tough was it to get in the Army Air Corps at this time?

Willis: It was very rugged. I remember Texas Christian University over in Fort Worth had a national championship football team in 1938, and a lot of those All-Americans that had banged up knees and one thing and another couldn't make it. I was kind of scrawny. I couldn't play football or anything. I ran on the tail end of the track squad at North Texas just for the fun of it. But I amazed a lot of people because I passed the physical. Out of thirty some-odd boys that took the physical the day I did, I think about four passed. I was as amazed as any of them.

Marcello: What was the thing that seemed to have disqualified most of them?

Willis: Oh, eyesight was one of the main things. They gave you oral examinations, too, to see how you would think and what you'd do under various circumstances and so on. A lot of them just had old injuries that you wouldn't think they'd be that particular about. But in those days, the Army Air Corps cadet, well, people thought it was made up of potential Lindbergh's. It was an elite organization. They only took so many. You had to have sixty hours. You had to be unmarried. You had to be twenty, but not yet twenty-seven. Those things were all relaxed after the war started and when they had to have more pilots.

Marcello: I was going to say that after they started becoming desperate for pilots, I'm sure that those standards went down quite a bit.

Willis: They dropped it to high school with a written examination. You could be married later on. You could get in at nineteen or twenty instead of twenty-one and all that.

Marcello: Well, continue the story from this point. So you went to Love Field, and you qualified for the Army Air Corps cadets. What happened from that point?

Willis: I learned later that I . . . they notified me that I had been accepted, that I passed my physical. Then I went to

Camp Bullis, Texas, in San Antonio. Well, Camp Bullis is an outside training grounds for Fort Sam Houston down there, where they do maneuvers. Well, in those days, they had the Citizens Military Training Corps called CMTC for youngsters like me. They paid you so much a mile there and so much a mile back. You'd go down for thirty days in the summer and take this military training. I'd already been one year previously at Fort Meade, Maryland, while my brother was in law school in Washington. So after having qualified physically for the cadets, they told me that I would be called at a later date. So I immediately put in for a month of training at CMTC in San Antonio, thinking that would further discipline me because it was so hard to get through the cadets after you were accepted. They still washed out probably 60 or 70 per cent. So I wanted to get some good, rugged discipline down there. It was hot and dry and dirty. The happiest day of my life was when the lieutenant called me in--I'd only been there about ten days--and said, "You lucky s.o.b., the Air Corps cadets have called you (chuckle)."

Marcello: So what happened from that point?

Willis: I packed my bags and got the hell back home and got ready.

So when they swore me in here in Dallas, I got on a train and went to Glendale, California. I went in October 14, 1940.

Marcello: That was your official date for actually entering the service.

Willis: Right.

Marcello: As you look back on it, what were your motives in entering the service? You mentioned awhile ago that a love of flying was perhaps one of the motivating factors.

Willis: Well, my favorite subject was history, and I agreed with my brother that we would be in this war, and if so, what part would I want to play in it? I knew I intended to help defend my country. So I decided on that and set a goal. I wanted to be a pilot. If we didn't get in it, well, fine, but I knew we would. I felt we would. It was quite obvious. So I just set my sights on that goal and followed through on it and stayed with it. Of course, as we'll get to here in a minute, I hadn't had my wings very long until I was fighting.

Marcello: So your first station was in Glendale, California. I assume this is where you went through boot camp or your flight training or whatever it might be.

Willis: Well, what they called it was the primary stage at that time. We stayed there for so many flying hours. Then they--those that survived that and didn't wash out, they get most of them in that first stage--then they sent them to other places for basic training, which is the second phase.

I came back to Randolph Field, Texas, and went through basic training there, the second phase. At the end of that training at Randolph Field, they split the alphabet. Those who didn't wash out there, the survivors, the first half of the alphabet went to Kelly Field. The second half went to old Brooks Field there in San Antonio.

Marcello: Now in going through this pilot training, were you at this time specializing in any particular thing, that is, as a pilot, as a navigator, bomber pilot, fighter pilot, anything of that nature?

Willis: No, you had no choice. There were some boys who washed out as . . . we were all in pilot training. At that time, until you got your wings, you didn't know what you were going to be. You knew what you hoped to be. But I really and truly didn't know myself. When I originally went in, I hoped to be an ace fighter pilot. But as it turned out later, I ended up being a bomber pilot. But they pretty well put you where they wanted to.

Marcello: Sure.

Willis: But there were a lot of boys who washed out of our group as pilots who still were determined to fly. They were allowed, many of them, to go to bombardier schools or navigator schools at other places.

Marcello: I think this is still done to some extent, a limited extent, today.

Willis: Yes, to some extent, right. But they don't go to school with the pilots. While I was there at Randolph Field, I met my wife. We were to be married--I'll get to that later--on December 7. But I got my wings on the 15th of August of 1941.

Marcello: What sort of a feeling was that?

Willis: A great feeling! All the hats went into the air. It was kind of like a bride throwing the flowers at a wedding, I guess you'd say. That was the ultimate thing in anybody's life at that time--to graduate from the flying cadets.

Marcello: Now at this time you had your wings, but again, you didn't know whether they were going to make a bomber pilot or a fighter pilot out of you.

Willis: Right. Here's what happened after we got our wings. They called us in, and they said, "Now we're going to

keep about half of this class in the United States. You'll be assigned different bases. Wherever your orders come and tell you to go is where you'll go. At that time, you will know what you were recommended for, as fighters, bombers, whatever. But we're going to send 25 per cent of the class to Trinidad, South America."

Marcello: Why Trinidad?

Willis: They needed some help down there just in case of war. Those all became fighter pilots. But I'd always heard that Trinidad wasn't too nice a place. It's hot and everything. Fortunately for the boys, they went there and stayed there the whole war and didn't do anything but look for German submarines and never got a shot fired at them. Everyone of them lived through it. But I said, "The hell with Trinidad." But they said, "We have one other, a third alternative. We're taking volunteers for Honolulu, Hawaii." Boy, I said, "Let me have that paradise of the Pacific!"

Marcello: I'm sure a great many people would have wanted to have volunteered for Honolulu, wouldn't they?

Willis: Well, they got their quota without any trouble. Me and my closest buddies were all more of the same nature, I guess, and we figured we might run into some action over

there. But what a nice place to go compared to Trinidad, and it would be my luck to be drawn to go to Trinidad. Because if you didn't volunteer for Hawaii, you just had to wait and see whether you stayed in the States or went to Trinidad. Well, I didn't trust my luck. So I volunteered. So my wife and I planned to be married in Honolulu after I found out where I was going, Christmas of 1941.

Marcello: Well, now the Hawaiian Islands in peacetime was considered pretty good duty, was it not?

Willis: Yes. Now there again, some pilots didn't volunteer because they didn't like the idea of flying over water, over the ocean--land based pilots. But that didn't bother me at all. It did later but it worked out all right. But those of us who wanted to do it, I guess, were the right ones to do it. So we went over there on the President Coolidge ship that I later saw sunk in New Hebrides unloading supplies for us after it became a supply ship and troopship.

Marcello: Well, where did you pick up the President Coolidge?

Willis: In San Francisco.

Marcello: Okay.

Willis: That was another thing. An officer could take his car over there on the same ship with him. I drove my car to

San Francisco, and they tied them down on deck and covered them up. We had a four and a half day trip over, and our cars went with us. So we thought it was good duty.

Marcello: I'll repeat what I said awhile ago. The Hawaiian Islands must have been pretty good duty in peacetime (chuckle).

Willis: Oh, it was wonderful. It was not commercialized. It was still like people dreamed of it.

Marcello: I assume that your future wife was going to join you later, and like you say, you were going to be married there.

Willis: Yes, we were going to be married that Christmas. We couldn't think of a finer, more romantic place in the world to be married and live and do duty.

Marcello: What happened when you got to Hawaii? In other words, where did you go?

Willis: The group out of my class, when we got to Hawaii, we were assigned to the . . . I believe it was then called the 7th Air Corps Headquarters at Hickam Field, Hawaii. But they had a small detachment over around Diamond Head, over on the opposite side of the mountain that runs through the center of Oahu. Directly across from Honolulu over the Pali was a Naval base called Kaneohe. But this Bellows Field was named after some pilot that'd been killed there. It was right at the edge of the water.

Marcello: In other words, this is where you were assigned, to Bellows Field rather than to Hickam.

Willis: Right.

Marcello: You may have gone to Hickam, but you eventually went on to Bellows.

Willis: I did go on to Hickam. We were actually assigned, and all of our records . . . that was our headquarters and our command. But my little squadron was living in temporary quarters and tents and little temporary barracks, more or less like an auxiliary field, at Bellows for that time being. So they assigned us to the 86th Observation Squadron. We were pilots on the O-47, which was then the heaviest single-engine plane the Air Corps had. It was something comparable to a Navy torpedo plane, I guess.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what this plane was actually like because, quite frankly, I'd never heard of the O-47.

Willis: Well, the O-47 was known to the pilots as "The Pregnant Pigeon." It was a big, old, fat single-engine plane. We had a rear gunner facing the rear in the tail and the pilot in the front. Then we had an observer in the middle seat who had all the radio equipment and camera equipment and a glass bottom. He could go down in the bottom and photograph things. In those days they used

them. Of course, they later found out the lighter liaison planes were best against the faster deals in wartime.

So my plans were made, like I said, to be married Christmas. In the meantime, we'd been flying dawn patrols during the excitement in Washington when the Japanese envoy was there trying to negotiate. In the meantime, I guess they already had their plans made.

But my best friend that I had the next bunk to, and we were inseparable friends during our training and when we went over, named Millard Shibley--they later named the gate to that field for him--was killed on a takeoff one morning in darkness. He went in the ocean. Our little runway, you'd take off to the water and land from the water. Since I was his best friend--he was an only child--his mother called General Short, who was in command, along with Admiral Kimmel at that time.

Marcello: Yes, Short was in command of the Hawaiian Department of the Army.

Willis: Right. That included us, too. So this boy Shibley's mother called from Tulsa, Oklahoma, and asked General Short would he make an exception. It was normal for an officer to meet a dead officer's body at the port of

debarkation in San Francisco and escort it home for the funeral. But she explained that he was an only child, and she was a widow, and we were his closest friends and all that. He made an exception, and I had a half-inch stack of orders to come home. My clothes were already on the ship, the Lurline, a Matson liner in Honolulu.

Marcello: The Lurline?

Willis: Yes, right.

Marcello: Now this is interesting because I don't know if you're aware of this or not, but the Lurline was somewhere in the ocean while the Japanese invasion fleet or the Japanese carrier task force were on its way toward Pearl Harbor. The Lurline actually picked up some low frequency radio waves. They couldn't quite make out what they were saying, but they knew that anybody that was using these low frequency radio waves was trying to hide something. Apparently, when the Lurline got back to Pearl Harbor, it reported this to the local military authorities, and nothing was ever done about it.

Willis: I didn't know this.

Marcello: You just happened to mention the Lurline, and it popped into my mind. But it's kind of one of those clues that was lost prior to the Japanese attack.

Willis: No telling where they were picking it up from. Anyway, this buddy's body was on board, and my clothes were all aboard, except for my tuxedo. You were required to wear them to the club on Saturday night. We went to the officers' club at Hickam Field just . . . I mean, that was our home. So I was to leave on December 8, on Monday, to escort his body back home, at which time I was going to meet my wife, my bride-to-be, at his funeral in Tulsa, and she was going back to Hawaii. I planned for her to fly back on the clipper a few days later. They called it the Hawaiian Clipper. I think it was a Pan-American plane. Anyway, I was traveling military, of course. So we went to the officers' club on Saturday night.

Marcello: This is how you happened to be at Hickam Field on December 7.

Willis: Well, no, I went back to Bellows. We went to Hickam Field on the night of December 6 on a Saturday night and got home probably three in the morning or something, back to our temporary base. When the attack came at seven something the next morning, they also attacked Bellows Field along with Pearl Harbor and Hickam Field. We had some planes coming, some empty B-17's with no ammunition, new ones--they were on their way to the

Philippines--that were coming in there at the same time this happened. Some of them tried to land at Hickam Field, saw what was happening, and two or three of them managed to get into Bellows Field. Of course, our runway was so short, they just ground-looped all over the place, but some of them did get in.

Marcello: All right, let me just go back a little bit before we get to that point, Mr. Willis. I have some general questions I would like to ask you to kind of give us some rather interesting background material before we talk about the attack itself. How far was Bellows Field from Hickam in terms of miles or either in terms of time? How long did it take you, let's say, to drive from Bellows Field to Hickam?

Willis: Oh, you could drive over the Pali and back down to Honolulu and to Hickam in just a few minutes.

Marcello: I see.

Willis: You could fly over there in just nothing flat.

Marcello: You were that close.

Willis: But as the crow flies, I guess it was ten miles or more. But the first I know . . . first thing we knew was a machine gun burst coming down, our BOQ was being strafed. We all ran out and saw the red balls on these planes,

and everybody said, "Hell, this is not a mock thing.

This is the real thing."

Marcello: Well, you're getting ahead of the story a little bit.

Willis: I'm sorry.

Marcello: Let me go back a little bit and get some more details in here.

Willis: All right.

Marcello: We'll eventually get to the attack, I promise (chuckle). But anyway, I just wanted to talk just briefly about the social life on the Hawaiian Islands at the time immediately before the war. Like you just pointed out, apparently one of the centers of your social life was the officers' club at Hickam Field.

Willis: Oh, yes, it was the nicest thing in the world over there. That was the reason I couldn't wait to get my bride over there and get married because this doctor friend of mine, who was a major--from Dallas, by the way, Dr. Price Walker--he and his wife were going to entertain my wife and have all these social parties like they did, give her the works.

Marcello: Now this was standard procedure in prewar Pearl Harbor, was it not? There was a tremendous amount of . . .

Willis: Pomp.

Marcello: Pomp and socializing and dinner parties and things of this nature.

Willis: Right, right.

Marcello: That was just a part of the standard routine.

Willis: That's true and they were going to give her a lot of showers and parties and things. It was just the thing to do on Saturday night--was to put your tuxedo on and go to the officers' club.

Marcello: It was a rather formal type of social life.

Willis: Yes, officers were required to go formal. I haven't been since. I guess I had the tuxedo on the last day that it's ever been required (chuckle). There are some places, I suppose, that in certain conditions, of course, you still have to, but not all the time. But we couldn't even go to the club and have a beer on Saturday night without wearing a tux.

Marcello: Under most circumstances, did you usually go to the officers' club at Hickam Field, or did you get into Honolulu periodically, also?

Willis: Oh, we went into Honolulu--the Moana Hotel and the Royal Hawaiian and those things, bars up and down the beach and all. We made the town.

- Marcello: I understand that Hotel Street was one of the more entertaining sections of Honolulu.
- Willis: We made the town just like you'd expect a pilot to do (chuckle). But we did enjoy going to the officers' club.
- Marcello: Besides that, the meals were cheap, too.
- Willis: It was inexpensive, and the drinks were cheap. They had the best Hawaiian music and hula dancers. They put the leis around everybody's neck, and you just had a ball.
- Marcello: I understand you could get a good meal there for \$1 or something.
- Willis: I really had a helluva party the night before in my honor because I was leaving to bring my buddy's body back to the States on Monday morning after this Saturday night party. So they entertained me royally. When somebody was coming back, if you wasn't going to be gone but a week or forever, you always had a going away party.
- Marcello: Now this brings up a rather interesting question. Quite obviously, the social life was quite heavy on a Saturday night. What sort of fighting trim or fighting efficiency would a lot of these troops been ready for, let's say, on a Sunday morning?

Willis: Well, when a man knew he was going to fly, he knew how to conduct himself, and his commander knew how he should. He knew better than to get out of line.

Marcello: This was true but I was thinking perhaps more in terms, let's say, of the enlisted men, as an example. In other words, let's say you were a Japanese admiral or some sort of a military strategist, and you were going to plan an attack on Pearl Harbor. Would a Sunday morning have been the best time to plan it for a number of reasons?

Willis: Oh, I think in peacetime that's probably true. I think that's possibly true. But the funny part about this, we had been on alert for a good while, and they had just called it off. So we did relax because the alert had been called off. We didn't fly the dawn patrol Saturday morning or wasn't going to fly it Sunday morning. But we had been flying it. I was taking off at five o'clock every morning for a long time before that. You had to be in shape.

Marcello: In speaking of these patrols, were these 360° patrols, or did you have a specific area of the ocean that you covered?

Willis: No, we fanned out all over.

Marcello: It was essentially a 360° type of patrol.

Willis: More or less, that's right. See, not only us, but the Navy and the bombers were also doing this. Of course, they assigned us more around the other islands because our planes were shorter range than the bombers and some of the Navy planes.

Marcello: Generally speaking, as I recall, the Army was more or less responsible for most of the short-range reconnaissance, and the Navy, with their carriers . . .

Willis: PBY's, flying boats.

Marcello: . . . PBY's were responsible for the long-range reconnaissance for the most part.

Willis: Yes. Of course, our B-17's could reach out.

Marcello: Sure.

Willis: The B-17's were all stationed at Hickam at the time. I'll get to that later, but I requested to go into heavy bombers right after the attack.

Marcello: Suppose you had been flying on Sunday morning, December 7. Would it have been possible that your particular unit might have come across this Japanese carrier force?

Willis: No.

Marcello: Were they still out of your range yet?

Willis: They would have been out of where I would have been assigned. Had all the forces been flying patrol, they would no doubt have intercepted them because the Japanese

fighter only has so much range to go in at full throttle and do his fighting and make it back to a carrier.

Marcello: Yes, well, they came in eventually up to about 200 miles.

Willis: Yes.

Marcello: How great was your range?

Willis: Well, in Midway, they were 180 miles away, so I assume Pearl Harbor was somewhere in that range.

Marcello: What was the range of the planes you were flying, these O-47's?

Willis: Oh, we could only go, it depended on our load. But they never sent us more than, oh, I'd say 300 miles out. Of course, we could have gone far enough to have intercepted them had we been sent in that direction.

Marcello: Another question comes up at this time, and it's more or less on a different subject. Hawaii has and had a rather large Japanese population. Did this ever cause very much concern among the Army brass at your particular field? I know it did at Hickam, but I was wondering if there was ever any concern on the part of your field with regard to possible sabotage being committed by Japanese on Hawaii who were sympathetic to Japan?

Willis: Yes. The highest ranking officer in my little detachment-- because like I say, we were assigned to Hickam Field-- but the highest ranking officer in my little outfit was a

major. But we often discussed it. There was a little village, Wailus, I believe was the name of it, nearby. They were all around the island, and Honolulu was full. As it later turned out over at Wheeler Field, they shot a Japanese who turned out to be a colonel who had a beer tavern over there with all these transmitters and everything. He'd get these GI's drunk and give them beer on credit and all that. Yes, I'd say there was some suspicion because we knew there were some who were absolutely full-blooded, loyal Japanese.

Marcello: Now I know that at Hickam Field and at some of the other air fields, they had the planes lined up in nice, neat, straight rows in order to guard against sabotage. They claimed that it was easier to guard the planes that way. Did your particular base take any precautions to guard against possible fifth column activity?

Willis: No. See, we were just over there temporary. We didn't have a hangar. All our maintenance was done at Hickam. We just had a runway and some tents and some temporary barracks, and that's all.

Marcello: About how many planes did you have there altogether?

Willis: We had about, I guess . . . I believe twenty-four. We just parked them out in the open. There was nothing to guard against. We had a mountain behind us. They had to come in from one way and go out the same way.

Marcello: Did you perchance ever have the opportunity to visit Pearl Harbor or get very close to the Naval facilities there?

Willis: Before or after?

Marcello: Before the war.

Willis: Oh, sure. Yes.

Marcello: How hard was it to get access to Pearl Harbor.

Willis: Well, I was an officer with an I.D. card and a uniform. We showed it at the gate when we went in just like they did at our base and like we did. But we had pretty good security. Yes, I visited Pearl Harbor. I went over there. In fact, that's where I bought my wife's wrist watch I sent her, at the . . .

Marcello: PX there?

Willis: Ship's store. Ship's store, they call it over there. I started to say post exchange. It's a ship's store. I had friends I visited over there, just like they did me.

Marcello: I assume from time to time they actually even held parties on some of the ships, is that correct?

Willis: Now this I do not actually know. I think they had under certain circumstances deals for the men. When they'd been at sea for a long time, they had to have an open house on the ship.

Marcello: How hard was it for a civilian to gain access to Pearl Harbor?

Willis: Well, it was hard.

Marcello: In other words, if you didn't have an I.D. card, you couldn't get on the base.

Willis: That's right.

Marcello: It wasn't a simple matter of walking on or off the base.

Willis: No, it wasn't open to visitors or a tourist thing. But if civilians . . . of course, a lot of them had a lot of civilian workers, like civil service. But these civilians who worked on the bases . . . we even had some Japanese working at Hickam Field. As you know, as it turned out, the Japanese had plans of Hickam Field that were several years old, when Hickam Field was built. They bombed the hell out of our baseball diamond because that's where the gasoline dump was supposed to have been (chuckle), across from the hangars. When they built it, they changed their plan and put them elsewhere. But they bombed the hell out of the baseball diamond with those time-delayed action bombs. They blew big holes all over that place (chuckle). That was one of the few mistakes they made. But each pilot that was shot down had a map of his target.

Marcello: Showing that the oil drums and the oil storage depot was located where the baseball field was.

Willis: Yes, that's where they thought it was.

Marcello: What did Pearl Harbor look like? I assume that it was a real beehive of activity with all sorts of ships coming in and out of there all the time.

Willis: Oh, yes. It was real interesting. Hickam Field and Pearl Harbor are right together. There's just a fence between them. In fact, we even had a little channel and a loading dock where ships, small ships, came in and unloaded at Hickam at our dock. But Pearl Harbor literally was a beehive. They had the big dry docks. Then they had all their maintenance. Then they had their seaplane base right out in the middle of it at Ford Island. They had battleship row and all.

Marcello: I'm sure that battleship row was a rather impressive sight, was it not?

Willis: It was. It really was. It really was.

Marcello: How close could tourists get to Pearl Harbor? In other words, were there excursion boats which may have sailed along the outskirts of the harbor or anything of this nature, where they could observe what was going on inside?

Willis: Oh, yes, yes. That happened, and in peacetime, if you knew somebody, you could get them on base and show them around--in peacetime.

Marcello: I understand you could also buy postcards of Pearl Harbor in the local drugstores and that sort of thing.

Willis: Oh, yes, sure. That was one of the . . . really, it was one of the attractions because it was the biggest Naval base in the Pacific. Magazines had big pictures. All these tourist bureaus had things on Pearl Harbor. You could buy all the postcards you wanted, air view and all. There was no secret there.

Marcello: I understand that some of the Japanese pilots were also found with these postcard pictures of Pearl Harbor.

Willis: Yes. But most of them had maps, just like the ones who bombed Hickam Field and our field. They all knew what their target was.

Marcello: Quite frankly, what did you think were the chances of a surprise Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor? Did you ever talk about it with your buddies and this sort of thing?

Willis: Hell, yes, we talked about it when we had to get up and take off in darkness at night on this dawn patrol, wondering what was going on in Washington. We knew that it was war over there with England and France against Germany and that the Japanese would probably be in sympathy with Germany. We had a little bit of relief

when they called the alert off. But during that two weeks or whatever number of days it was that we were under alert, we talked about it all the time.

Marcello: Well, let me rephrase my question just a little bit. It was quite obvious, I think, that war with Japan was . . .

Willis: Possible.

Marcello: It was very possible. But at the same time, Pearl Harbor was about 4,000 miles from Japan. What did you really think were the . . . did you think that the Japanese had the capability to attack Pearl Harbor?

Willis: We knew they had a tremendous navy and a tremendous air force and a lot of navy pilots who were seasoned because of their combat experience against the Chinese and that if we came to war against them, we were going to be going against pilots that'd already been where we hadn't, experience-wise. But, of course, we didn't think anybody could whip us, and we had all these big guns up in the mountains and ammunition dumps and everything. But the surprise attack caught me unaware.

Marcello: Well, I think it caught a helluva lot of other people unaware, too.

Willis: It sure did.

Marcello: Did you have the typical conception of a Japanese? Did you think of the Japanese as the little fellow with the buckteeth and the horn-rimmed glasses or something of this nature?

Willis: No, we'd seen so many of them on the island, and I had remembered going aboard a Japanese ship in Galveston when I was a kid. They were very well-disciplined. We knew this. We knew if we got in war with them that we were going to have a rough deal. But at the same time, we didn't expect them to come over there and knock our navy and air force out that fast. Of course, we were not at war with anyone at the moment.

Marcello: In other words, as a professional pilot, you did have a lot of respect for the Imperial Japanese Navy and the Japanese Air Force in a professional sense.

Willis: That's true. When we went on these dawn patrol missions, we knew damn well we wasn't looking for Germans (chuckle).

Marcello: Well, you mentioned that prior to the actual attack on Pearl Harbor, there were a number of alerts and certain precautions that were taken for the eventuality that a surprise attack might possibly occur. The Japanese had been known in past wars to resort to surprise attacks.

Willis: Yes, but I have to be honest with you. I couldn't conscientiously say I really expected them to come over there and knock us out. I was complacent and dumb enough, having never been to war in my lifetime. I had not seen one or experienced it. I assumed that I must have just complacently thought, "Well, if they declare war, well, the United States will declare war, and then Germany and Japan will end up on the same side, and then we all get going."

Marcello: Well, I think most people assumed that if war did come, the Japanese were probably going to hit the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines first.

Willis: Right, not us.

Marcello: Of course, eventually, they did hit those places almost the same time they hit Pearl Harbor.

Willis: Right. That's exactly what we thought. Now you asked me awhile ago, getting in retrospect, we figured the . . . what's the name of the field in the Philippines?

Marcello: Clark Field.

Willis: Clark Field, in the Philippines would be absolutely one of the first places they'd hit with our Air Corps there and that they would hit all those island places in the Dutch East Indies, as you say, and gradually spread.

We were going to head them off. But I didn't think that they would hit all those places and us, too, at the same time.

Marcello: You talked about alerts and maneuvers and things of this nature prior to December 7. Describe what these alerts and so on were like. What sort of procedures were followed, that is, in the patrols, for example?

Willis: Well, we were just looking. If we were to sight . . . we knew where our ships were supposed to be, and if we sighted an unfriendly or foreign ship, we were supposed to radio immediately. Then the high command would know what to do. But that was our mission, just to go look.

Marcello: Were these alerts around-the-clock patrols?

Willis: No, because they can only come in so far in so many hours. So if you took off before daylight and went as far as you could go out and come back, they wasn't going to have too much time to go before you'd get them again the next day. I don't say that they didn't stagger those. I was just a shavetail second lieutenant at the time. I don't know whether the Navy PBY's went out at night or not. I really don't.

Marcello: Well, again, I think we need to keep in mind that the planes, I assume, were not equipped for night flying.

You almost had to do all your flying in daylight, did you not?

Willis: Oh, well, we did night flying. But in the Pacific on a moonlight night, I'd rather fly at night on patrol than in the daytime in some respects.

Marcello: Why is that?

Willis: Well, the air's smoother and pretty, and the moon's shining on the ocean. You could see a ship or something but naturally not as good as you would in the daytime. But we sure became used to it after the war started.

Marcello: What sort of relations existed between the Army and the Navy on Pearl Harbor? Was there close cooperation between the two branches?

Willis: Oh, yes. The cooperation, I think, was all right. I think in those days you more or less stayed . . . the Air Corps, as it was called then, we didn't--not because we had a dislike or anything--we didn't associate with the Army, the tank boys and the infantry and probably less with the Navy and the Marines. But we, the fliers, in the Army Air Corps more or less associated themselves together, and the enlisted men did, too.

Marcello: Were there any joint maneuvers or joint alerts? In other words, did the two branches exchange information as to what they found and this sort of thing?

Willis: I understand they did in the high command. But there again, I was a second lieutenant. I only did what I was told to do.

Marcello: A great deal has been made of the Army's portable radar stations on the Hawaiian Islands. Did you know anything about them, or did you ever have a chance to observe any of those radar stations in operation?

Willis: No, not firsthand.

Marcello: I was wondering if perhaps you knew anybody that was with them.

Willis: No, I didn't know anyone who worked with them. That was out of our scope. We knew of them, heard about it, but I didn't personally know anyone who worked on them.

Marcello: Okay, well, this more or less covers most of the preliminary activity leading up to Pearl Harbor. I think we're at the point now where we can talk about your activities on the Saturday night of December 6. As you mentioned awhile ago, you were over at Hickam Field at the officers' club in your tuxedo, just prior to your departure for the States or your supposed departure for the States in order to escort that body back to this country to Tulsa, Oklahoma. Why don't you pick up the story from that point. So that Saturday

night, you were in the officers' club in Hickam Field.
What'd you do?

Willis: All right. We went over there, and knowing that I was coming back, why, naturally, it was a big party. Everybody has to buy you a drink when you were coming back. I had no orders other than to be on that ship Monday morning. So we had a ball. We got back over to Bellows Field, I guess, about three or four o'clock in the morning. As a matter of fact, I had such a big party, I still had my tux on when the machine gun fire came through the roof that next morning. I had my shoes off. I had my tux pants on (chuckle).

Marcello: Can we draw any conclusions from what your physical condition might have been when you came back to Bellows Field from Hickam?

Willis: Yes, you can. Well, my condition wasn't worth a damn when I got back from Hickam to Bellows. But when them machine gun bullets came through the roof, it got pretty good. But we were young, and in those days you could drink and get up in the morning and suck on that oxygen and fly just as good as anybody. I did it a lot of times after I got back in the States. So when the bullets came through the roof, and we heard these bombs going off,

they set our . . . old temporary . . . they hit all our gas tanks and everything because they were out in the open.

Marcello: About what time was this? Could you estimate the time?

Willis: Oh, it was seven . . . well, we'll have to check history now, but it was 7:05 or 7:00--somewhere in there--in the morning. We heard all these explosions and looked out the window. Our fuel supply and fuel trucks were burning. Airplanes were burning. They'd stopped strafing the personnel and the barracks then. They was after the planes.

So we all ran out. So I ran out. I just made a smart remark. I said, "Well . . ." now that's the way you'll do when you've got half a hangover. I said, "Us Texans like to die with our boots on." I reached in my footlocker and got my cowboy boots and put them on with these tuxedo pants and shirt and grabbed my flight jacket and helmet.

We ran out there, and God, we saw these planes just diving and strafing with the red balls on the wings. We knew then it was for real. There'd been maneuvers and mock warfare and stuff with the fighters. But when we saw what was happening, we knew danged well what it was,

and we recognized the Zero. We had studied the identification of their aircraft and things.

So it got so hot, I had to find a hiding place. There was a ditch digger out there, a trenching machine, where they were laying utility line across there. This ditch was about two feet wide and probably four or five feet deep. So I ran out there. Then I saw one of my buddies whose name I can't recall. But he was a fighter pilot. We had several P-40 fighters there, too, along with our planes, and they would come over there and stay a week and then leave. Well, there was a bunch of P-40's there.

So this fighter pilot was . . . a sergeant, a ground chief, already had his plane warmed up. He was getting ready to try to take off. Well, everytime one of our P-40's would buzz down the runway, a Jap would be right on top of him strafing him, and he'd blow up or go in the ocean or whatever. Or if he got off the ground, by the time he got his wheels up, they'd get him because they were just swooping down on him.

I was trying to get him up into his cockpit. I was pushing him from behind. Well, the parachutes we wore then were like a backpack, and you'd sit on part of it

after you got in your cockpit and buckled up, but it was hanging down behind you while you were climbing up. So I was pushing on his rear, pushed him up on his wing of this P-40 fighter. One of them came down and shot the plane and just blew . . . shot it all to hell and killed him instantly. Blood went all over me. When the machine gun bullets went through his body, they lodged in that pack parachute. That's what saved me, or I'd have gone with him.

So I immediately ran on over then. I saw that was futile. So I ran and jumped in that ditch behind this trenching machine that was not working on Sunday, just sitting there. I jumped down in this trench. Well, about that time the strafing caused a clod of dirt to hit me in the eye. I screamed like . . . I just knew I'd been shot right through the head (chuckle). I got just a chunk of dirt in my eye (chuckle). I guess there's something funny about everything bad.

So then they went away, and I got my plane off the ground. Then I got up and looked down on Pearl and all and saw what the hell was happening and we . . .

Marcello: Well, how many planes were left at your base? There couldn't have been too many left there, were there?

Willis: Well, there wasn't. I'm coming to that. But I got off the ground after I found out I wasn't hit in the eye (chuckle). We had no ammunition, so we were told just to fly up and down over the treetops up in the valley and try to save our airplane.

Well, when it was apparent that the Japs had left, we got the all-clear signal. They had left, and as you recall, there was a second attack. Okay, in the meantime, I had a chance to get up and see Hickam Field and Pearl all burning and realized . . . and we were getting the word then by radio and all that everything had happened. So I came back and landed. Then they came back the second time and got my plane. So we were wiped out over there.

Immediately, well, they issued us rifles and pistols and told us to take our little bedroll and put it in the trunks of our cars because they didn't know where they'd send us, but we'd be on beach patrol. So we started running around, and they assigned us to some quickly mobilized National Guardsmen on that side of the island. Sure enough, as you mentioned earlier, there was a Japanese colony right near there. That's why . . . so we spent the night patrolling the beach and looking for anything.

Marcello: Let's just go back here a minute, and we'll come to that. What did the field look like? What did Bellows Field look like after both Japanese attacks had occurred? Describe as best you can what it looked like.

Willis: Well, as I showed you in this picture, there were just tents and ~~temporary~~ quarters. When they got our gasoline trucks and our little radio shack and those airplanes, they knocked it out. There was nothing operational.

Marcello: In other words, it was completely useless. It was knocked out of operation.

Willis: It was useless. Of course, there were some B-17's that did come in there, that got shot up a little bit but not destroyed. They were fortunate to get in late. But they couldn't land at Hickam, and the ones that did caught hell.

Marcello: Well, let's talk a little bit about those B-17's that landed at Bellows Field because that's, I think, an important part of this whole Pearl Harbor story. As a little bit of background, of course, these planes were on their way from the west coast and ultimately to the Philippines.

Willis: They were on their way to Clark Field.

Marcello: They were completely stripped. In other words, they had no guns, no bombs, nothing at all.

Willis: Nothing.

Marcello: I'm sure they were low on fuel by the time they got to the Hawaiian Islands.

Willis: That's true because they hadn't been flying direct for too awfully long.

Marcello: Of course, they simply happened to hit the Hawaiian Islands at the time that the Japanese were attacking Pearl Harbor.

Willis: Yes, and that's another thing. You mentioned the radar. We were told later that the reason they didn't pay any more attention to it was because they knew these planes were coming in from the States, and they just took it for granted or thought that that's what they saw, although they wasn't coming exactly from that direction. I don't know about this. You've read just the same as I have, the rumors and so on about that slip-up there.

Marcello: Yes, well, this is true. But getting back to these planes again, can you describe the actual landing of the big '17's?

Willis: Well, some of them landed at Hickam Field and were knocked out, and some others were damaged where they were able to repair them.

Marcello: But did you mention that some of them landed at Bellows Field?

Willis: I believe there was two or three--may have just been two--that came on into Bellows Field on this short runway and ground looped off down at the far end.

Marcello: Did the Japanese go after them?

Willis: They didn't completely destroy them, no. They shot them up a little bit. But they had already been roving all around the island and didn't know where to go. They saw this little strip, and the ones that got in there safely got there late enough. But in the meantime when they came back, then we realized . . . you could even hear everything blowing up at Pearl Harbor. Of course, Honolulu was just as calm as could be. They wasn't after that. They wasn't after the commercial docks or anything. They was after our fleet and our air force.

Marcello: I'm surprised that these B-17's were able to land on your little strip, considering that there must have been bomb craters and that sort of thing.

Willis: They never, never, never would have attempted . . . well, see, now I hope I didn't leave a wrong impression. There were no bombs that I actually saw dropped on Bellows Field.

Marcello: This was all strafing?

Willis: It caused explosions. I may have referred to hearing bombs.

I meant explosions. But it was just fighter planes strafing because we had such an easy target for them to knock out. They concentrated their heavy stuff on Pearl Harbor and Hickam Field. Of course, they burned hangars full of airplanes and all that over there. Pearl Harbor was just an inferno.

Marcello: As best you can remember, what was the general reaction of the men here at Bellows Field when this attack took place? Was there panic, fear, confusion, futility? How would you describe the general reaction of the men?

Willis: More cussing than anything because we didn't have anything to fight back with and couldn't shoot them down.

Marcello: I don't want to put words in your mouth, but would perhaps frustration be a good word to describe the attitude of most of the men from the standpoint that you felt so helpless?

Willis: Yes, it was some frustration. But I think we were more cussing than anything and mad and couldn't wait to get . . . I suppose on account of Pearl Harbor, there were more volunteers. With the situation in America today, young people are reluctant to go in the armed forces. But after the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, we had no trouble getting this country going to production in a

hurry. But over there, among those of us who were there, every damn one of us wanted to go kill some Japs, and we all volunteered, most of us.

Marcello: Did you see men firing . . .

Willis: The first thing in my mind was to go get in them heavy bombers. I got in my car and hooked them on over to Hickam Field and saw what was going on. Of course, we did what we could do to help with the wounded and everything. But I immediately volunteered to go in the bombers the next day.

Marcello: But at Bellows Field, did you see men futilely trying to shoot at these Japanese planes with .45's or rifles or things of this nature?

Willis: Yes, I've seen . . . the old sergeant was out there, and he started issuing us pistols and all. Yes, I did see this happening. The old sergeant was out there just shooting at them with a .45 pistol (chuckle). But we had no . . . but we did have armed P-40's if we could have gotten them in the air. But they were shooting them down like . . . well, they didn't have a chance because they were heavy and slow on the takeoff until they got going and maneuverable. There were so many Japs, they were just swooping down on top of them.

Marcello: You mentioned this one funny thing there at Bellows Field, where you put on your cowboy boots. Did you observe any other funny things that occurred there as you look back on it in retrospect?

Willis: Oh, not really.

Marcello: How about courage? Did you see any acts of courage?

Willis: We didn't lose so many men right there. But our people in our group . . . like I said, there was just a handful of us over there as you saw from this picture. It was just a little campout. But we lost a lot of our men in the enlisted men's barracks at Hickam Field. Of course, the Navy suffered the heaviest.

Marcello: At Bellows Field, did you see acts of heroism and courage, that you would consider acts of heroism and courage, taking place?

Willis: I wouldn't call it heroism, but it took guts for me to go out on that flight line and try to push that pilot up on that plane with all that strafing going on. You opened yourself right up in the middle of it. But when I saw there was nothing I could do, I wanted to get that fighter in the air. I don't call it guts or courage. I was mad. I think Americans probably react that way under fire more than you would expect, more than you would think you could.

Marcello: Okay, how long did this attack take altogether? Both attacks, how much time are we talking about?

Willis: Oh, that's history. We could go into the history books.

Marcello: I'm sure to you it probably seemed like hours perhaps.

Willis: Well, it seemed like a half a day, but I'm sure in an hour and a half or two hours it was over.

Marcello: Now we've more or less talked about the attack. Now let's talk a little bit about the aftermath. You mentioned that you almost immediately thereafter received orders to team up with this National Guard outfit. Now you want to pick up the story from that point?

Willis: Yes, yes. Before dark, we all had orders to be back to Bellows Field. They told us, as I said, to take your ammunition that had been issued to you and your rifle and your pistol and all the ammunition you could handle. They supplied us with all that and said, "Now you're on your own. We will tell you, but for tonight, you put your" We all had our automobiles, and they said, "If you don't have one, team up with somebody and put your bedrolls in your trunk because we don't know what's going to happen. But there's one damn thing we're certain of. We've got to patrol the beaches. In time, somebody'll probably tell you what to do." We wandered around and went up and down the beach in different spots.

Marcello: Now at this time, you were not yet teamed up with the National Guard people, is this correct?

Willis: No, not until that night. So by nightfall, they pretty well had it ringed around the island, different units of Army, Navy, Marine, Air Corps, whatever. Those pilots that had airplanes left . . . I had one buddy, George Welsh, who became an ace. He shot down a bunch of them. I've forgotten exactly how many he got in the Pacific. But he got four that morning.

Marcello: You knew Lieutenant Welsh? He was one of the P-40 pilots that did get in the air, is that correct?

Willis: George Welsh was one of my closest friends.

Marcello: Welsh and Taylor were the two that got in the air, right?

Willis: Right. That's right, and they got some Japs.

Marcello: Now they were at another small air base, too, were they not?

Willis: Right. They were right over at the end of the island past Bellows Field at another remote little landing thing. It was a good thing they wasn't at Hickam Field. They got in the air, and George got four of them.

Marcello: What do you know about their exploits? I'm sure most of what you do know would have been secondhand, perhaps what you heard from Welsh. But I guess they were two of

the heroes on the American side so far as acts of bravery were concerned.

Willis: Oh, certainly--Welsh and Taylor. I knew Welsh the best. We partied together a lot. I later saw a little colored ad on Wheaties or something, a little funny-paper-type thing, years later, about how many Japs he shot down all during the war and in the South Pacific and all that. I'd lost contact with him. But he was one of those baby-faced, angel-looking little . . . had a real young face. You wouldn't ever think of him as being an ace before the war ever got started.

Marcello: But apparently Welsh and Taylor just took on a whole bundle of Japanese planes. They were completely outnumbered.

Willis: They did. They waded right into them. They waded right into them and did a good job.

Marcello: I would assume that in the aftermath of the attack, Pearl Harbor and the Hawaiian Islands were simply one big rumor mill. What were some of the rumors that you heard?

Willis: Well, of course, it was a sneak attack as far as I was concerned. As far as rumors were concerned, hell, we were prepared for parachute troops to land during the

night and then for them to come right on in with an invasion force. We knew that if they had enough, they could have done it. We were hoping that . . . we had ammunition dumps up in the mountains and cans and stuff, but I didn't know how much. I was just hoping we had enough. But we didn't have any Air Force or Navy, so there was no way we could hold them off. I can remember during that night patrolling that beach with those guardsmen there, and I thought, "Boy, this thing could last four or five years before we get to go home, or they might capture us before tomorrow's over."

Marcello: The paratroopers and the possible invasion were two of the more plausible rumors. I've even seen somewhere . . .

Willis: We imagined . . . a lot of people imagined they could see them coming down out of the sky (chuckle).

Marcello: There were rumors that the water supply had been poisoned, and there were rumors that fifth columnists had . . .

Willis: Well, rumors . . . see, there were so many Japanese on the island who were loyal that there were all kinds of rumors there of sabotage and all.

Marcello: But actually, as it turned out, there wasn't a whole lot. The Japanese populace was pretty loyal to the United States.

Willis: It was minimal. It was minimal. There were a few incidents.

Marcello: I'm sure there were a lot of trigger-happy GI's that night, too.

Willis: Well, that's very true. But as I told you, they later captured this Japanese tavern owner over by Wheeler Field. He had all this radio equipment and everything, and he turned out to be a colonel in the Japanese . . . he was in espionage, I guess. He'd sell all these GI's drinks on credit and everything and get them to talking about their equipment.

But I was surprised there wasn't more sabotage than there really was. Of course, they had no occupation forces with them. All they wanted to do was knock out our Navy the best they could. I don't think they had any idea in this world that they would be able to get in there and do as good a job as they did and then spread out and hit these other bases over the Pacific at the same time. But to be able to catch Pearl Harbor bottled up, the fleet, and the knockout punch that they delivered, I think, was as much a surprise to them as it was to us. I mean, the result was, of course. It was well-planned, but . . .

Marcello: It was. From what I've read, Yamamoto, the man who planned the attack, virtually had to threaten to resign

from the Japanese Navy if the plan wasn't accepted because most of the Japanese brass didn't believe that the Pearl Harbor attack could be accomplished either. In fact, even at best, Yamamoto only believed that it had something like, oh, possibly a 60 per cent chance of success.

Willis: Thirty to forty, yes. This movie "Toro Toro Toro" was the most authentic movie I've seen on the attack. Yamamoto, I have heard, was really and truly not in favor of it.

Marcello: Well, he was not in favor of war with the United States.

Willis: But Tojo and the high command . . . and I found it out later . . . I was down there in the Solomons when our boys, our fighter pilots, shot Yamamoto down.

Marcello: Shot Yamamoto's plane down.

Willis: They took off from Henderson Field where I was.

Marcello: Well, anyhow, so immediately after the attack, then, you were assigned to your personal automobiles, and you were more or less on your own, patrolling the beaches and this sort of thing, is that correct?

Willis: Right.

Marcello: Okay, what happened from that point? Had martial law or curfew been declared at this time yet or that night?

Willis: I assume it had, yes, and they immediately told everybody to leave their lights out, not to drive with any

lights on. Of course, later they painted the lights on everybody's cars black and put a little blue spot in the middle to where we could barely see. So we fanned out, and I ended up . . . and I've forgotten now just how it happened that I ended up with this group, but we were together off Bellows Field there right nearby on the beach.

Marcello: Now this group you're referring to is the National Guard outfit?

Willis: Yes. Everybody was on the same team. Nobody knew who belonged to who or anything. But they were all out there for one purpose, on patrol. Of course, they had an officer with every so many enlisted men scattered out. I was with this group.

So just at the crack of dawn, someone--not me, but one of the others--spotted this black thing sticking out of the water, and then it disappeared. As the tide, the waves, would come in and recede, well, that thing would stick out of the water and disappear. It turned out to be the conning tower on this seventy-foot, two-man suicide submarine. So we all immediately zeroed in on that to see what the hell was going on.

Well, then as the sun started to come up, and it got lighter, well, it turned out that one of the two

men had drowned. The other one . . . why they didn't get out sooner, I don't know. But we don't know how long they'd been there. But had they been able to get to this little Japanese village right nearby, they probably would have been covered up by some sympathizers. We'll never know.

This two-man submarine had a ring around its propeller, and it got hung up on a reef out there, on a coral reef, and it was damaged, as you can see in this photograph. They couldn't get loose from this coral reef. Well, of course, those submarines had been to Pearl Harbor. I don't know whether this was on the way to Kaneohe or what, or whether they were trying to make . . . since it was a suicide mission . . . if they could have escaped, well, maybe that was their intention. But they had 500 pounds of TNT in there. After they expended their two torpedoes, one on top of the other, they were supposed to ram something, and that 500 pounds of TNT would blow up the submarine and them and whatever they rammied. Well, they didn't set off the . . . they decided they didn't want to die, I guess (chuckle).

Marcello: From what I've read, this particular submarine had gyro problems. The thing couldn't be steered very well, and that's how it ended up on the reef.

Willis: On the reef, yes.

Marcello: Well, anyhow, you did capture one of the Japanese seamen, isn't that correct?

Willis: Yes. So then while we were watching this thing, one of the guardsmen started firing into the water. I said, "Don't do that. What do you see?" He said, "I saw a Jap, sure as hell, sticking his head out of the water." I said, "Well, my God, we need a prisoner. If that is one, it'll be the only one." I said, "Don't fire anymore." So finally, he couldn't take it any longer, and he realized . . . after these shots, well, he just came up.

Marcello: He wasn't ready to die for his country?

Willis: His toes and fingers were shriveled up. He said later that he'd been in the water for hours, but he couldn't find a place where there wasn't some troops. So he had been in the water for hours, and his buddy drowned. These are his coveralls here (pointing to photograph). He didn't have them on. All he had on was a little belt that were fine stitches--their ceremonial deal.

Marcello: Yes. Just a G-string, was it not?

Willis: G-string, right, with all of their good wishes from everybody on it. He was clean-shaven, hair clipped, ready for the final gesture for the emperor. But as you

say, they evidently decided they didn't want to die. So he came out, and we captured him. So we took him up to this little old hut that was kind of dug into the side of a hill. It was just a lean-to or headquarters thing we had there and interrogated him. So they immediately . . .

Marcello: Could he speak English?

Willis: No, not a word.

Marcello: Were any of your National Guardsmen Japanese-Americans perchance?

Willis: I don't recall. There may have been some. Most of them were Hawaiian-type mixture like this one with me here (pointing to photograph). He's a mixture of something, but I can't tell you what. But there was a mixture of Filipinos and so on. So we took him up there. Heck, everybody had pistols on him. He wasn't going anywhere. He was so weak by then. So we took him up there, and he bowed and just clammed up. So we got the word to get an interpreter, a local Japanese. But before this happened . . . we did that later.

Marcello: Was your first impulse to perhaps rough this guy up so you could take out your anger on him.

Willis: Oh, yes. We almost did. We cocked a hammer on a .45 and stuck the barrel right in his eye and jammed his head

against the wall and everything else when he wouldn't say anything. But at first, to try and soften him up we gave him a couple of boiled eggs, and he bowed. We gave him a cup of coffee, and he bowed. We gave him a cigarette, and he bowed. Then we gave him a piece of paper and a pencil and motioned him to start writing. He didn't know nothing. So then is when we started jamming a gun in his eye and pulling the hammer on the .45 back and everything and threatening him.

So he finally just took the piece of paper and pencil, and he sat down and wrote in these Japanese characters. So the interpreter got there, and it turned out to be, "I am Japanese naval officer. I expect to be treated as same. I failed in yesterday's battle. So please kill or let kill self by intimate method--hara-kari. But I no say about ships." He slammed his pencil down and clamped his arms together and flexed his muscles and just looked us straight in the eye and dared us to kill him.

So with that we put him in one of those big old military, Navy-type laundry bags and pulled the drawstring on him, tied him up, and pitched him in the back of our

truck, and with all the jabbering and kicking like a danged wild animal you had in the sack (chuckle). So they took him . . . the authorities or the high-ups wanted him. So they took him over to the stockade at Schofield Barracks. Eventually, they sent him back to the States.

Marcello: He was actually the first Japanese prisoner-of-war.

Willis: Yes, that's what we were told and haven't heard any different to this day. He was sent back to the States and remained in California the whole war. Then as far as I know, he's still in Tokyo or somewhere over there.

Marcello: Now this would have actually occurred on December 8.

Willis: December 8, in daylight.

Marcello: I would assume that it was during that same day, then, that you eventually went over to Hickam Field and volunteered for the bombers.

Willis: Right.

Marcello: Of course, that opens up an altogether new story, which we'll probably touch upon some other time.

Willis: Yes, immediately they told me I could start out on twin-engine B-18's, which was an old bomber that wasn't worthy of combat. But they were flying them. So I got my first multiple-engine training in that and then went on and became a co-pilot in a B-17.

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Marcello: Like I say, that's a different story, and we'll talk
about that some other time.

Willis: All right.