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Interview with

JAMES A. NASSER

November 13, 1987

Place of Interview: Kenner, Louisiana

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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(Signature)

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Dr. Marcello: **This is Ron Marcello interviewing James A. Nasser for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on November 13, l987, in Kenner, Louisiana. I am interviewing Mr. Nasser in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was a member of the 98th Coast Artillery, which was stationed at Schofield Barracks during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.**

Mr. Nasser, to begin this interview, 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.

Nasser: I was born in Herrin, Illinois, on June 14, 1914. I am seventy-three years old. Herrin is a little mining town.

Marcello: Tell me a little bit about your education.

Nasser: I had a complete high school education, and that is as far as I got.

Marcello: When did you join the Army, or when did you get taken into the Army?

Nasser: Well, the draft started when President Roosevelt was president. Naturally, we had to endorse our name--everybody of a certain age. I was about twenty-four or so, in that area. I'm single and all, and my number was 137. Fortunately, and unfortunately, they drew my number, and I was supposed to have went in on December 13, 1940. They had mobilized the National Guard prior to that, and I would have been in the first bunch to go in. But I had a little business. It was just a peacetime draft, so I appealed it, and they gave me a three-month reprieve. So then come March the 14th or 25th of 1941, I get a card to report for induction or for whatever in Indianapolis, Indiana, at Fort Benjamin Harrison. I ended up there, and when they checked me, I raised my right hand, and I knew I

was in the service. My number was 35155307--my Army serial number.

Marcello: Where did you take your or basic training, as they called it at that time?

Nasser: I took my basic training where we're going to have our national meeting next year--at Fort Eustis, Virginia, near Norfolk and Newport News. That's where I took my basic training. The buildings--a lot of them--weren't even finished.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened in basic training that you think we need to get as part of the record, or was it the normal Army basic training?

Nasser: Well, it was the normal basic training, but little did I know how long I would eventually be in. I thought I was in for a year. I went in in March, and I thought I'd be out in March of 1942. Little did I know that when we finished that we were going overseas. We had a lot of boys from Indiana--Terre Haute boys--training, and we had boys from New York and New Jersey.

We were given a pass, then, to go see our family. Well, some of them boys didn't show up for a week because they heard that we was going to

Hawaii. I was late. I came back, and I had two days of AWOL on my record. I almost got through the MP gate, and he called me back. He said, “You know you’re two days AWOL.” So it’s on my service record. I was scared in a sense because I thought I was leaving my country, which Hawaii now is the fiftieth state.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what your reaction was when you found out you would be going to the Hawaiian Islands.

Nasser: I thought I was leaving my country. I thought it was just a year’s training: “Why should I go over there?” But there was a reason, since all this has happened, now that it’s come to pass. Now I know why.

Marcello: At that time, would it be safe to say that when you thought of the country getting into war, your eyes were turned more toward Europe than they were toward the Far East?

Nasser: Well, I do know this, now that history has passed. I knew we had to get into that war with Hitler. I know that we had to help England. We have always helped them. We helped them in 1918. I used to hear the news on the radio--Hitler would be on the move-

-and I knew in my subconscious mind that someday that we'd be involved in that. As time went along, what I thought would happen was correct. They bombed Pearl Harbor, and later I went to Europe.

Marcello: Up to this point, I'm assuming that your basic training and whatever other training you had was relatively the routine kind of Army training that a draftee would get at that time.

Nasser: Yes. We learned to throw hand grenades, and a lot of it was tin cans. A lot of outfits even had broomsticks for rifles. They weren't even prepared. But it was just training to get the motion, and we had to hit the ground just like an infantryman or rifleman would. Our rifles had bayonets. Oh, we hiked sixteen miles one time. I did KP one morning in Virginia. I got up, like, 2:00 in the morning, and we worked all day. Then they had the same KPs carry a pack, and we had to walk right after that for sixteen miles in full field pack. That's the way basic training was. We cleaned our beds; we washed the floors. Oh, they were meticulous about housekeeping and cleanliness. But it was routine for me because I came from a family where we had to do things like that.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you got into the 98th Coast Artillery.

Nasser: This was a new outfit, and I feel, now that it's happened, that they needed more strength over there. It was a new outfit. The 98th Coast Artillery wasn't a realistic outfit. They had outfits that were there years. In fact, I ran into several of my Terre Haute boys that joined the service years ago as a permanent thing. I was a draftee, and most of my outfit was made of draftees. At that time we could wear civilian clothes because it was peacetime. But that's the way it was. We formed a new outfit. We formed, like, Battery A, B, C, D, and all. We were a 3-inch coast artillery outfit, which meant that you could protect the coast and you could still fire at the airplanes. That's what our primary job consisted of, was to protect that island. So there had to be something in their thinking to need more strength over there.

Marcello: So you actually, then, were part of forming a new unit when you got to the Hawaiian Islands?

Nasser: We were a new unit, absolutely.

Marcello: Did you go directly to Schofield Barracks once you got there?

Nasser: Yes, we did. We went to Schofield Barracks.

Marcello: Give me a physical description of what Schofield Barracks was like at that time, and you might want to center on your own quadrangle where you were staying.

Nasser: All right. Well, we had to catch a little train--I'll never forget that--and they had the sugar cane fields, and, you know, they could put tracks wherever they wanted. We got to Hawaii with, of course, the greeting with the leis and all. Then we got on this train, and we went up where Schofield Barracks is now. The shacks were like gable-type roofs, made of wood. We had mosquito bars because mosquitos were prevalent over there. Our shower was always way in the back, and the dirt that you'd walk in would get on your ankles; so if you took a shower and came back, you still had red dirt. So that's the way it was. They were screened in, and we had mosquito bars with, like, a T-handle at the front and then T-handle at the back. Then you'd put up the mosquito bar so at night you could sleep.

The mosquitos were worse than they are in Louisiana.

Marcello: **I'm assuming that you were living in one of those so-called quadrangle areas?**

Nasser: **Yes, we were in that area, and you could see that it was nothing like the 27th Infantry. As you proceed into Schofield Barracks, you've got big brick buildings and all. You could see remnants that had been there for years. Ours was a makeshift thing made for us. They were made to accompany our new outfit, so that's what it was.**

Marcello: **So you were not in one of those traditional quadrangles which were more or less self-contained units?**

Nasser: **No, not like they are today. If you go back today, they still have the big buildings that we had, but they don't have Schofield Barracks because they're completely annihilated.**

Marcello: **Let's talk a little bit about life in that pre-Pearl Harbor Army there at Schofield Barracks. First of all, talk a little bit about the kind of exercises and training that this new unit underwent once it got there.**

Nasser: We had physical exercise every morning. You'd get up, I think, around 5:00 or 5:30. The first thing we did...our training field was right next to our barracks--a big training field--and we'd do our exercises--calisthenics and everything like that.

Then everybody would go out and practice on the guns. I tried to be a gunner, but I'm too small. We had a big guy from Gary, a steel worker who had worked in a steel mill, because to run those 3-inch shells takes a pretty good arm.

We'd keep in practice, and we would take hikes. I'll never forget this one lieutenant from California who had come from Europe, and he was of European descent. Well, all of our parents come from the Old Country somewhere, and I'm a diehard like him. I said, "If he can do it, I can do it!" So we took a hike about twenty miles over the mountain area. In some of the areas where we went on hikes, the mud was like a volcano. It was just like glue, so your foot would sink in there, and as you pulled your foot out, sometimes it would pop your heel off. Well, we had maybe a hundred men start out, and I think that when we finished up late that evening, I had my shoes tied around my

neck. I had blisters on my feet, and so did Lieutenant Poulada. I'd say we had maybe fifteen or twenty out of a hundred who made that trip back. That was our routine of keeping physically fit. Lieutenant Poulada was a very fine lieutenant. He believed in physical fitness. He had blisters on his foot. He had his shoes, but the point was that he made it and showed them what you can do if you have to do it.

Marcello: Talk a little bit more about the specific training that you had relative to your function as a coast artilleryman. For instance, was there a particular area where you were to set up your battery and so on--your guns?

Nasser: No. We had our guns in the park there right near us always, in case that we...and that's what happened on December 7. We'd go to Malakole Beach, and then we'd fire. We'd shoot our ammunition there, at Malakole Beach. That's normally where you fired at, because you couldn't fire around the base area. We'd clean our guns. We had radar and everything else. Our flashlights were wrapped in blue; the lights on the cars were wrapped in blue, pretending you're in war, you see. That was for

“blackout,” as they called it. We had, like, thirty days of that.

Of course, one of the things that irked a person was we always had to “police-up”--pick up anything that didn’t grow, such as cigarette snipes, pieces of paper. That’s one thing they taught us, was discipline and cleanliness. Our bunks had to be just right when they had inspection. We’d have monthly inspections of our bodies. For our passes we had to stand inspection. Our rifles had to be...they’d wear white gloves, and if they found grease in it, you didn’t get out. You either got KP or watch. That’s the way that life span went on and on. If we wanted to go to Waikiki Beach, we wore civilian clothes at that time.

Marcello: **Suppose you had an alert or something of that nature. Was there a specific place where you would go with your weapons?**

Nasser: **Well, if we had an alert...we always had our guns in the park, and we would contemplate that we were to go. But the main thing is...like a fireman in a fire department, when they get an alert, they have their clothes ready, and they jump down a pole and**

get in the truck and go. But we simulated a lot of this, you see. We just didn't actually pull our guns and all away because at the time of Pearl Harbor our defense was over at Wheeler Airfield, which was getting terribly smashed. Our location was Wahiawa. We were in communications, and that's where we had to pull our guns and put them in place. But we would simulate--get dressed, have our gas masks, have our rifle. There was no live ammunition; it was just simulated.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, and as conditions between the two countries continued to get worse, could you--even in your status--detect any change or changes in your training routine?

Nasser: No. In fact, like I said, what surprised me was why we went there thirty days, and then seven days later we got attacked. But what a wonderful training that was. We were prepared for a war thirty days prior to seven days of the attack. Something now has to click. Why did they do that? Why was orders...because everything was given by orders. You do what you're told to do.

Marcello: So when exactly did you get to Schofield Barracks?

Nasser: Well, after the 30th of November. Everything was peaceful, and, of course, the Japanese were on their way during that time. I don't know how many days until...

Marcello: I guess what I'm asking you is, when did you get to the Hawaiian Islands? What was the date?

Nasser: Oh, in June of 1941. I think it was June 30.

Marcello: So you were there almost six months prior to the actual attack itself.

Nasser: Right, right.

Marcello: And you could detect no change at all in your routine?

Nasser: Oh, no, no, no--no way. No way did I *ever dream*! No way did I ever dream that we would have ever been bombed. I'm going to say one thing, and I'll say it again. Whenever you go to the Hawaiian Islands, they've got a twenty-four-hour patrol, and that is true. That's one thing I commented to some of my comrades. They always had a twenty-four-hour patrol, and that was it. That morning they didn't have any patrols. Everything was status quo. It was just like you left your door open on purpose, and I was able to walk in and come in and steal or whatever. They didn't have anything on patrol. One

thing that I always noticed was that the Air Force would put on programs for us, and every now and then you'd just hear the run of airplanes. Well, you saw that they were American airplanes. That morning it was a little different, you know. We thought they were putting on a show for us until that happened.

Marcello: We'll come to that later on. Let me ask you some other questions at this point. I do know that during that pre-Pearl Harbor period, the Army was obsessed with the possibility of sabotage should war come with Japan. As you know, there were many people of Japanese descent living in the islands. What do you know about the sabotage alerts?

Nasser: Absolutely. The one fellow was a Japanese admiral, and they called it Hasebe's Bar. He was the nicest fellow, and our barracks and our outfit was close to his bar. I did not know that he was a Japanese admiral, and neither did the others. He'd been planted there for years, and, you see, that's the way the Japanese do. Did you know that this man had a wireless set in back of his bar? This was told to me afterwards. He was giving information to the pilots. That's why they did such a good job, was

because they had so much infiltration over there. You had people that were so loyal to their country, and they'd die for their country. They were sent there for a purpose, and that's to get information. So you get a bunch of GIs in a bar, and they get to talking: "Well, we're going to so-and-so." Then he'd get all that down and wire it. They let him know the strength, what's happening, what ship's coming in and where they're going and everything. That morning, believe it or not--I don't know if this is true; I was in my battle position then--I heard that they went in there and shot him. The MPs killed him.

Marcello: Now where was Hasebe's Bar located?

Nasser: Oh, it was right out of our post, a few blocks away, because you had to get a pass to go out of the post.

Marcello: But let me ask you again what I just had mentioned. While you were there before the attack, do you remember any anti-sabotage alerts taking place?

Nasser: No, no. This Haseby was real kind. If you didn't have money, he'd let you have something, and you could pay it when you came back. That's how kind

he was. So he became a friend of the GIs, and behind your back he was military personnel.

Marcello: But you don't remember any alerts whereby troops would go out, let's say, to guard a particular bridge or a reservoir or anything of that nature?

Nasser: No, no, not in our outfit, no. One thing is, that was the closest place, and you could walk there. If you wanted to go to Waikiki Beach, you had to catch a bus and go. You would usually do that on the weekends if you weren't on detail and had a pass.

Marcello: Let's talk about some of the extracurricular activities that a soldier would probably engage in there at Schofield Barracks. First of all, what was there to do there on the base after hours?

Nasser: Well, we had USO entertainment. The hula troupes were tremendous--much better than they are today. They were professional, and they would bring their troupes and entertain us. We'd have entertainment. We'd have bands come over there and play for dances at our area. Then we had this USO where it was actually at Schofield Barracks. We always walked. We never had cars. We would attend their dances and things like that. Then we'd sit around and play

cards--blackjack and things like that--to amuse ourselves. We'd have movies. That was about the life of our stay there, and it was the same thing, usually.

Then on the weekend, if you got a pass, why, you'd go to Waikiki. Of course, I didn't go every week because the sailors were more predominant than the Army, and there were just so many sailors there. So I would stay around the barracks. I love music. I used to be a musician, and I played in the band. I used to have my drums there, and we used to sit around. Some of the guys were musicians, and we'd "jam" awhile, as they said back in those days.

Marcello: **You mentioned card playing a while ago.**

Nasser: **Yes.**

Marcello: **Off the tape, we were talking about the book *From Here to Eternity*.**

Nasser: **Yes.**

Marcello: **One of the things that I remember is that gambling played a prominent role in the life of the troops there at Schofield. What do you know about that?**

Nasser: **Oh, yes, we played blackjack. At home I was never a card shark or a checker player or anything like that. But I got lucky. Blackjack was really the**

game. Some fellows would play poker. Gee, if you play cards, you can file away two or three hours, but then you've got to get ready for reveille the next morning. I think that was the way of a pastime for most of the servicemen. We'd play for a dime or a nickel or something. The fun part is, if you win you get so acclimated to want to keep doing it. But that's the way we passed a lot of our time.

Then we'd read books and the newspaper, or we would just get outside. I'm not a smoker. A lot of fellows smoked, so they'd go outside and smoke and walk up and down the area there. That's it.

Marcello: **There were places on that base, were there not, where there were some pretty high stakes games?**

Nasser: **Oh, yes, yes, there was, yes. One of the fellows that I knew when I came back from the mainland...I used to call it the States, but they call it the mainland. When I had a chance to come back to California, to the mainland, gee, this fellow brought over $2,000 back. He was from New York. He accumulated a lot from gambling. Some of them played dice, and that was big stuff. Many of the boys...I can recollect when I went in, I got $21 a month; and when I was a sergeant, I got $60 or so**

a month plus the privileges. This fellow from New York must have been a professional gambler. When we caught the boat together to come back, he had over $1,500.

Marcello: Now this gambling was illegal, was it not?

Nasser: Well, I presume it was, but they never did anything about it to the men as long as we were not in trouble. Some guys would drink to excess and get drunk, and they'd come in loaded. But we always had to get up and have reveille.

Marcello: Some people have referred to that Army before Pearl Harbor as the "jockstrap Army" there at Schofield Barracks. What role did sports play in the life of that pre-Pearl Harbor Army?

Nasser: Well, I'm a basketball player, myself. I'm from Indiana. I played on the same floor that you see today...Larry Byrd plays for the Boston Celtics. Now he's from my area, and I played on the Indiana State floor. I used to play basketball on the same floor as this young man from French Lick, Indiana, who's a hero on the Boston Celtics. Every now and then, we'd have competitive sports. Another thing I used to do, they had a track, and to keep myself in physical shape, I'd run around this track. It

was about a one-mile track. I'd keep myself in shape.

I used to box. I wasn't a professional boxer, but both of my brothers were. We'd engage in fisticuffs. A lot of times they'd have boxing matches there between different ones, and that's the way it was.

Then they'd bring these hula troupes in for entertainment.

Marcello: Is it not true that some of those infantry units over in the quadrangles would actually recruit ball players for the various sports events?

Nasser: Oh, yes, that's true. They had baseball. That was another thing.

Marcello: Is it not true that also some of the star athletes got special privileges? Maybe they would be advanced a little bit more quickly in rank, and maybe they'd have some of the softer jobs.

Nasser: Well, I can't say that. I got advanced because my IQ was high, and I fulfilled my capacity. It was a competitive thing. I wasn't the only one. It's just like a job. You can have ten men knowing what you're doing now, and if your IQ is better and you stand out better, then you're probably going to be

selected. I know one fellow over there that knew guns so well, but his only problem was that he was an alcoholic. To have someone be in charge or to repair these guns, they had to give him back his rank. They busted him frequently, but they didn't have officers or anybody that knew the equipment like this young man, so they had to reinstate him as a sergeant. But his downfall was that he loved the booze, you see, and that was the way it was during the Army days before we came in.

When they came in, they had a different personnel. You had people from all walks of life that went in for a year, and they brought with them their talents, you see. I wasn't exposed to all this drinking and things that a lot of guys did. Maybe some guys had divorced their wife, and they went into the service, and they were called Regular Army men. I was a draftee.

Marcello: That's interesting that you bring that up. So you could see that definite distinction between regulars that had been there for a while and this influx of draftees.

Nasser: Oh, day and night. We taught them a lot of things, and a lot of them were jealous because we got ranks

real quick. Some of those fellows, if they made PFC in two or three years, they thought that was marvelous. PFC is one stripe. They'd become a corporal in, gee, four or five years. Gee, I became sergeant in about three months.

Marcello: Now are you saying--don't let me put words in your mouth, and correct me if I'm wrong--are you saying that a lot of those regulars may have been misfits? Is that a good word to use? Maybe that's too harsh.

Nasser: Well, I wouldn't' say that. I got $21 a month. Back in 1941 I was making, like, $40 or $50 a month. I was capable to make more money, and we all had to make a living. I was young and ambitious. Most of those fellows had problems, and to escape their problems they joined the service.

Marcello: That's the point I was trying to make, yes.

Nasser: Absolutely! This is true. That's why, when we got mixed up with them, eventually they leaned toward us. They found out we had a lot of knowledge. We were more educated. Some of these boys didn't even have educations.

Marcello: And I suspect most of those people that were there when you arrived more or less perhaps hoped to make the Army a career, that is, if they could stay in.

Nasser: That’s true; that’s right. They couldn’t handle civilian life like you and I. This is true. I was in almost four-and-a-half years. When I went in for a year, I couldn’t wait until March of 1942. That’s all I kept doing on my calendar. I wanted to get home.

Marcello: But these guys had planned to be twenty-year men, so to speak.

Nasser: Yes, they were career men--absolutely.

Marcello: How far was Schofield from Honolulu?

Nasser: Well, let’s see...we caught a bus. I would say it’s about...well, like from Kenner to New Orleans--about fifteen or seventeen miles. It wasn’t too bad. I didn’t have a car or anything; I couldn’t afford one. But we caught a bus, and we got there.

Marcello: So you had easy access to Honolulu.

Nasser: Oh, yes, yes.

Marcello: How often could you get into Honolulu if you so desired?

Nasser: Well, I was a noncommissioned officer, so I had my privileges, and I wasn’t on duty. As long as you weren’t on duty--pulling guard or something like that--then you had access every weekend if you wished to go. If you wanted to fight the Navy and

all that...it's crowded up there. Like I said, that's a Navy base, and we were just a minority. They were the majority.

However, I would go to the Royal Hawaiian Hotel at Waikiki Beach. Later on, after the war, Artie Shaw and his orchestra was there. Since I loved music, I went there every weekend to see Artie Shaw. The piano player was from my hometown--Claude Thornhill, who had his own orchestra. Then Sam Donahue had his own orchestra. He had men playing for him. Each one would play their arrangements. Artie Shaw would play his arrangements, like, "Begin the Beguine." He had all top men. Claude Thornhill would take over and play "Autumn Nocturnes," "Snowfalls"--piano. Sam Donahue was the saxophone player, and he would play his arrangements. That was really good. All we had to do, if you were a drinker and wanted to drink, you'd buy tickets for so much, and you could dance on the floor.

I'll never forget this. While I was up there, Artie Shaw at that time had married Lana Turner. You danced with what they called the "natives." They were either Filipinos, Portuguese, Hawaiians,

and all. Many of the Navy men would dance up close to the band and say, “Artie, how was Lana Turner? How was Lana?” It would make him mad. Oh, it would make him mad. He was playing “Begin the Beguine.” He was a nice-looking guy.

Marcello: So I’m assuming, then, that when you went into Honolulu, you pursued your interest in music.

Nasser: Yes. Everywhere there was a band, I’d always...the Royal Hawaiian had a native band, and I’d go there just to listen.

Marcello: We’re talking about the Big Band Era, are we not?

Nasser: Yes, the big bands like Benny Goodman’s. See, I played in Chicago when I was seventeen and got to see Benny Goodman, Bob Crosby, Eddie Duchin. I was at the Palmer Hotel when Eddie Duchin lost his life. Now Peter Duchin, his son, plays the piano. I saw Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey. I saw them after they busted up. I knew them all because I was musically inclined. I studied music up there, and I played on Broadway and Diversey seven nights a week at seventeen years old. I made $22.50 a week.

Marcello: You played where?

Nasser: On Broadway and Diversey in Chicago. Music was my career. I was seventeen, and that’s what I was

going to do. I was pretty good. I had a good roll. The teacher who taught me taught Gene Kruppa, who played with Benny Goodman, and Buddie Rich, who recently died. I was fortunate in having a good teacher, and I thought I was a pretty good pupil. All I had to do was get experience. But I enjoyed it, and I played seven nights a week, and I made $22.50 a week.

Marcello: **Did you ever play on the side here in Honolulu to perhaps pick up a little extra money?**

Nasser: **Yes. We had a little trio. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, we took over the defense of Pearl Harbor. We moved our outfit to Pearl Harbor, which is Pearl City. They had a little nightclub. In fact, when my wife and I came over, we stopped there, and I showed her where I had the drums and played. This fellow that was from New York played the piano. We used to go over there and have jam sessions. Oh, I got a big charge out of that. When I came back home after the service, I played drums, you see. That was my life. But then I got married and went for other pursuits. I had to make a living.**

Marcello: Just out of curiosity, did your pursuit of music and so on have anything to do with your ending up in this area?

Nasser: No, I was in the food business. My daddy was in business fifty years in Terre Haute, Indiana. Would you believe that in a town of 80,000 people--and I think it's still 79,000 or 80,000; I've been gone since 1952--we had, like, a hundred Nasser stores that were just like corner grocery stores. This was when everybody was equal, and they were all independently owned. My dad has his store; my cousin owned his store. We tried to merge to buy on a volume market like your big chains--A&P. But you can't have a hundred presidents and a hundred cashiers; you had to have one. So they didn't quite go for that. We stayed as independents. So when I came back, I worked with my daddy. That's how I knew the food business.

Then at seventeen, I left for Chicago, and I was playing music. Then I started playing jobs. I found out how simple it was. You dress up in a nice suit, carry your drums, and you play and you make people happy. They'd always applaud for you, and you're always on stage. That was the thrill I got.

It was doing something to make people happy, and that's the way I am today. I like to make people happy if I can.

So anyway, I came back, and I opened my business. I had $90 in discharge pay, and I had an insurance policy. I cashed that in, and that was about $2,000. I started my business, and I raised my four kids and wife. Then I got sick seven years later and ended up in the hospital. The doctor said that if I went back and did what I was doing--I was only thirty-something years old--that maybe I wouldn't be as lucky. I was short of breath; I had a spasm. You know, that can eventually affect your heart, so I sold out everything. I came down here, and I just pursued a different profession. I was in the home improvement business here.

Marcello: **When you went into Honolulu on liberty, could you stay overnight if you wished?**

Nasser: **Oh, yes. I stayed at the Moana Hotel. That's a very famous name over there, and it's still there right next to the Royal Hawaiian. I think it's still in existence. It's right next to the Royal Hawaiian. Years ago, if you wanted to hear Hawaiian music, you could turn on your radio, and a lot of them**

played behind the Moana under the big banyan trees. I used to go there on weekends and hear them broadcast to the mainland. They'd play this Hawaiian music.

Marcello: That's kind of a different policy from what the Navy had because I think most of those people who were in the fleet had to be back aboard their ships at midnight.

Nasser: Yes, they were a little different. A lot of them didn't stay as long as I did. I was on a base here; I wasn't on a ship. They came in, and they'd go out; they'd come in, and they'd go out.

Marcello: I'm assuming that probably the number of times that you could actually stay over in Honolulu would be limited, given your limited cash.

Nasser: Well, that's true. Whatever amount of time that...if they gave you a three-day pass, you could stay three days. I think I stayed about three days one time at the Moana, and it was very reasonable. I forget what it was. But remember, $21 a month "ain't" very much, and then $60 a month isn't much. But I'm a conservative-type of person. I learned that from my family.

Marcello: On any given weekend--and you would have to estimate this--what percentage of Schofield might be off the base?

Nasser: Oh, I think most of them...a lot of them were broke. As soon as they'd get their money, they'd gamble. They didn't have money.

I'll tell you one thing. When I was in Virginia, our sergeant was from New York. He was a good sergeant. He really trained us good. He was a young fellow. People would be broke. My comrades would be broke. They'd get $21 a month. So he was in the finance business. He'd say, "All right, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you $3.00, but you pay me $5.00 when it's payday." And, boy, I mean, they did that. As soon as payday came, he was there to get his $5.00. That's probably what happens when a person can't leave the base.

Marcello: This loansharking activity is another one of those things that's mentioned very prominently in ***From Here to Eternity***.

Nasser: Yes, yes, it is. I remember seeing that. That was with Frank Sinatra, I think.

Marcello: Yes.

Nasser: But, again, the story and the picture didn't impress me like ***Tora! Tora! Tora!*** I think that will give you a little more insight. But ***From Here to Eternity*** is a story about Pearl Harbor with Frank Sinatra.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, and as relations between the two countries continued to get worse, could you detect any changes at all in your training routine? For instance, were there any alerts or any extra maneuvers or anything of that nature?

Nasser: No. We just finished thirty days and were happy. That was a tiresome thing, you know--thirty days of the same thing. Then we finally got to our barracks and got to relax. Now the attack occurred seven days later. Of course, you read in the newspaper where Nomura and Kurusu were up in Washington talking peace talks. They knew all the time that this was going to happen, but they led the United States with peace. On the outboard line of the island, they detected something, and they tried to get the message over, but nobody would believe them. Admiral Kimmel and General Short were blamed for all this, but it wasn't their fault.

They were not to blame for this. The blame was in Washington, D.C. We had to get in the war with Hitler, and that's why this was started--because you cannot sell a war to the United States. Can you go right now and say, "Let's have a war" to the American people? Half of them went to Canada this last time. We couldn't do that. I'd be a disgrace to my family and a disgrace to my country.

Marcello: So you'd just come off thirty days of field exercises, and you were back in Schofield about a week, then, before the attack took place.

Nasser: Yes. That Sunday morning I was reading a newspaper about peace talks--Sunday morning, December 7.

Marcello: How closely were you keeping abreast with current events and world affairs at that time, that is, you personally?

Nasser: Well, as much as I could in the newspapers. That morning, you know, the first thing they hit was the airfield. Let's face it, the Japanese are well-schooled, and they're religious, and they do what they're told to do. If they say, "You bomb this and that's it, and get back," that's what they do. They follow orders. Americans don't do that. We'd probably go overboard and blow out a tank or

something over and above the call of duty and maybe get court-martialed for it. The Japanese did everything that they were instructed to do. They got our airfields first in the first wave at 7:45. Then they came back, and they had no resistance, so now they came in for the battleships and everything else that they could get on their way.

But I was reading in the newspaper that morning about peace talks, and all I could think about was March, 1942. I was thinking, "Let's see, they probably will send me back in February to get me discharged," because I was in for a year.

Marcello: Let's hold off on that because we're not quite to the point yet where we need to talk about that. At that time--again, I'm referring to the period before Pearl Harbor--even in that week leading up to the actual attack, is it safe to say that your eyes were still turned more toward Europe than they were toward the Far East?

Nasser: Well, I kept abreast of Europe through the news. I always kept abreast from the day before I went in. I used to have my radio on in my store, and I'd hear about Hitler going in here and here. Yes, my mind was on Europe. Oh, yes, I kept abreast. I

don’t just read the sports page. I don’t today. I read the stock market. I read everything--the obituary column. I read everything in the newspaper. That’s what it’s for.

Marcello: Okay, that brings us into those days immediately prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, so we need to go into this in a little more detail. Just describe that weekend of December 7. In other words, let’s start with Saturday, December 6. Do you recall what your routine was on that day?

Nasser: Yes. I was going to go to Waikiki Beach. I had a pass. I had an honorary pass, so I could go when I wanted as long as I had performed my duties and everything was under control. I said, “Oh, gosh, I don’t think I’ll go tonight. I’ll go tomorrow because, man, I know the Navy will be there.” You see, normally, when I went there, I’d go to the Waikiki Theatre and take in a show. Then I’d go to the Royal Hawaiian and whatever and listen to music. Then I’d walk around on Waikiki Beach, which is beautiful, and just spend that weekend. Someone had asked me, “Do you want to go to Waikiki?” I says, “Well, I’m going to go tomorrow.” I was all

planned to go tomorrow, and I just stayed at my barracks, and that was it.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened in the barracks that evening?

Nasser: No, nothing. About everybody had gone on pass. Some of them were walking way down about two blocks, which is where our shower was in this red sand. They'd put a towel around their body and walk down there and get a shower and come back and dress. Some stayed in their barracks; some played cards. That's about it.

Marcello: Were there a lot of people who had gone to town that evening?

Nasser: Yes, there were quite a few because some had to go then. They couldn't go on Sunday because they had duty to do. So, yes, there's always somebody that goes on Saturday. Usually, I'd go on Saturday, but I held off until Sunday morning, which I never did go.

Marcello: Normally, on a Saturday evening, would there be very many people who were inebriated that came back into the barracks? I guess what I'm saying is, how great a problem or lack of a problem was excessive drinking in the Army at that time.

Nasser: Well, not too much. Most of them that went to Waikiki, that's where they did their drinking. There were a few who still went to Hasebe's over there because of lack of funds. Like I said, there was a few in the barracks, and luckily they were there the next morning. But we just wiled away the time, and then you'd sleep. You'd go to sleep--put your mosquito bar down. I took mine down and went to sleep.

Marcello: You mentioned a little town a while ago which is close to Schofield, and I just want to have your comments about it. You mentioned Wahiawa.

Nasser: Wahiawa.

Marcello: What was there to do over there?

Nasser: Well, it's a little town just like any little suburb town. There they had restaurants; they had bars; they had shopping centers. Sometimes you'd go and buy things. I bought five pairs of eyeglasses and sent them home to my family. They'd sell beads and leis. Then you can go to hula shows if you wanted. For a normal routine, they had restaurants there to eat, and they had theaters there.

Marcello: In other words, it was a little town to...

Nasser: Entertain.

Marcello: ...to lighten the GIs of their money and so on.

Nasser: That’s right, and also to break the monotony of being in a camp with just men all the time and breaking the routine of the same thing, you see. It’s just like if you just stay in here all day. You’re going to get tired. You just want to get out and get some fresh air, so you take off. You get in your car and go somewhere.

Marcello: Okay, on a Sunday morning, if one didn’t have any duty, could one more or less sleep in, so to speak?

Nasser: Yes, if you didn’t have any duty, you could sleep in. There was no inspection or anything. That was your day. Some were going down to get in the shower to go to church. We had churches for the different faiths. A lot of them would sleep in that had been out all night. Me, I’m an early riser. I can get in at 12:00 or 1:00 in the morning and get up at 4:00 or 5:00 just like nothing. That was a routine in the grocery business. My dad used to get up at 2:00 and 3:00 in the morning to open his store at 4:00. We had miners that had to go to work.

Marcello: What was your routine on that Sunday morning of December 7? Describe it for me in as much detail as you remember.

Nasser: Well, my routine is, I stayed around and talked with the boys. We sat and just engaged in the "gift of gab" and walked around the barracks--things like that. One of them asked me, "You want to go on a pass?" I said, "I'm going to go tomorrow because I think it's going to be too crowded." Usually, Saturday was just packed, and everywhere you'd go you just bumped into GIs. Of course, not everyone, like I said, wore their military uniforms because you were allowed to go in civilian clothes. I had my slacks and everything. I never actually would go down there in my uniform. I always wore my slacks. I felt like a civilian. I always wanted to feel like a civilian.

Marcello: Now you're referring to that Sunday morning?

Nasser: I was referring to Saturday evening.

Marcello: Saturday, yes, okay.

Nasser: On Saturday I might have gone to bed about 11:00 or 12:00 at night. Then on Sunday morning I got up early. Of course, we got the newspaper, and that was before the attack. I liked to read the

newspaper. I still do it today. The first thing I do is read the newspaper.

Marcello: **Okay, so proceed with your routine then on that Sunday morning.**

Nasser: **I read the newspaper. The first thing you know, why, my attraction was when I heard a [makes whistling sound] and then "BOOM!" And it was close to us! Well, we thought Wheeler Airfield was putting on an air show, and many of the boys thought that. The first thing you know, I heard another [makes whistling sound] and "BOOM!" Well, they'd hit the chemical plant near us. We had various areas where we had the chemical engineers, the infantry. First thing you know, I heard, "ACK! ACK! ACK! ACK!"--machine guns strafing. Naturally, we got out of bed in our shorts. We jumped out and looked in the air, and we said, "Man, Wheeler Airfield is really putting on a show!"**

Marcello: **You're looking out the windows in the barracks?**

Nasser: **No, we went outside because we didn't have windows in our barracks. It was screened--screened with a gable--and then we had those mosquito bars. There was no windows, nothing to slide. It was a makeshift barracks.**

We all got out there. Some of the boys had walked way down for showers and were coming back or going to church. Some were getting ready to get dressed to go on passes. That's what I would have been doing. When I heard the machine guns, they strafed and went through our barracks. Their idea was not to kill us *per se*. They were saving their ammunition for the airplanes and Pearl Harbor because they could run out of ammunition so they would not be doing what they set out to do. You know, they are going to do what their superiors tell them.

Marcello: **So you're down...**

Nasser: **We're outside looking up.**

Marcello: **What do you see?**

Nasser: **Well, I saw the plane go by, and I saw the rising red sun. I knew airplanes and all, but at that moment I didn't know that was a Japanese plane. Some people recognized it because they did have schools where they taught you the formation of Nazi airplanes and that the rising red sun is the Japanese. I just couldn't figure out what it was, and the only way I knew it was happening was that here comes a fat lieutenant in full field pack. And**

I'll never forget this. He had his whistle and his gas mask, and he says, "Get to your battle positions! We're being attacked!" And here we're all out here on our exercise field. If they wanted to, while he was coming, all he had to do was to pull the nose of his plane down, and I might not be here talking to you. And a lot of them got it that way. But that was not their purpose of going over there.

Marcello: How low was this plane coming in that you saw?

Nasser: Oh, they flew like...well, I mean, you couldn't use your 3-inch guns because they fire miles up into the sky, and that would have been wasting your ammunition. You could fire at these Japs with rifles.

Marcello: Could you see the pilots?

Nasser: Yes, you could see the pilots. Then what happened right after that, they shouted, "Get to your battle position!" So it was like a fire department: "We've got a fire! Let's get in and get dressed! Slide down the pole, get in the car, and go!" We had to go draw our ammunition. Well, we had Springfield rifles, and I think I had a revolver. I was allowed a revolver. They put bandoleers of ammunition

across this (gesture) way and one here across your chest. I had a Springfield rifle, so I went and loaded myself with Springfield ammunition. That's a bolt-action thing, and I wish I had it today. I got my ammunition on my belt for my pistol. Everybody had to go get dressed, get our gas masks, our helmets. We didn't have the big helmets; we had those half-moon helmets. We got ready, boy, just like that, and we had to go over there and get our guns to the truck.

Marcello: **Did you have any problems in drawing your rifles and so on?**

Nasser: **No, no. The rifles were always near us because we always drilled with rifles.**

Marcello: **But usually where they're kept, that area is locked up, is it not?**

Nasser: **No, no. Ours was always by our bunks. Oh, no, we didn't have ours locked up because we were responsible for our own rifles. Every weekend we'd have inspection, and they'd wear white gloves. We had, like, West Point men there. That was back in the old days. If they took their glove and wiped your bore out and any grease came, you got gigged. No, we had our rifles there. All we had to do was**

draw the live ammunition. That was at the supply room, and, man, he was putting it out.

Marcello: So there were none of the usual formalities undertaken in terms of drawing ammunition?

Nasser: Oh, no. Anybody could go there and get it and get to your battle position and get the trucks lined up.

Marcello: Okay, now by the time you get to your trucks where your guns are, how much time has elapsed? You might have to estimate this.

Nasser: Oh, gosh, at least...oh, golly, you had to go in line and get your stuff, and everybody's nervous. You're going back to get your gear. At least fifteen or twenty minutes elapsed.

Marcello: In the meantime, what are the Japanese doing relative to Schofield Barracks?

Nasser: Well, Schofield Barracks was not one of their targets.

Marcello: They were ignoring it?

Nasser: Yes, but we were near Wheeler Airfield, and that was what we were to defend. We had to pass by there.

Marcello: At this point, that is, by the time that you get to your guns and the trucks, are things pretty well organized, or is there still chaos?

Nasser: Yes, we're nervous and scared. One boy says, "Boy, I sure wouldn't need a laxative now, Jim! I'm scared to death!" His lips were purple. I was frightened. Everybody was frightened. I don't care who it was. It's your first taste of war.

Marcello: Are your officers there?

Nasser: Oh, yes, the officers were there. See, what happened over there is that it was always like a nightclub for them. During peacetime they always dressed, and a lot of them were at dances and all. They didn't even know it happened. In some of the pictures that you saw, it showed them in their formal uniforms and having a good time because that was a country club for them. It caught a lot of them off-guard, and they had to call them back. A lot of them weren't even at the command post and all; a lot of them weren't even on the ships.

Marcello: Okay, so your officers are there...

Nasser: What officers we had--the officers that were on duty--but that didn't mean all your battalion officers were there. They were out with their family. They had places to stay and live. The enlisted men lived in barracks, you know.

Marcello: But were all your enlisted men there?

Nasser: No.

Marcello: And the reason I say that is because you mentioned that they could stay over in Honolulu.

Nasser: Right. A lot of them were at Waikiki Beach. The word got through by messages to get to your battle positions. They dropped bombs on Waikiki Beach and all, and some civilians got hurt over there.

Marcello: Now which battery were you in?

Nasser: Headquarters Battery.

Marcello: Was Headquarters Battery, to your knowledge, at full strength, or was it not at full strength?

Nasser: I don’t think it was quite at full strength, no. But we had enough to carry on to do what we had to do.

Marcello: Okay, so what happens now?

Nasser: We pull our guns. Now we have to go right by Wheeler Airfield and if you get...have you been to Hawaii?

Marcello: No, I sure haven’t.

Nasser: If you get up to a certain peak, you can see the whole island. You can see Pearl Harbor; you can see Diamond Head. You can see it all at a high place. So we had to go by Wheeler Airfield.

Marcello: What do you see?

Nasser: Well, they were just getting plastered. They had their airplanes like two rows of corn lined up. They didn’t have machine guns on. Everything was just like peacetime. All I saw was bombs hitting them and blowing planes up. I think one or two planes might have got up --I understand. But all they did was just hit one plane full of gasoline, and it hits the next plane. The hangars were getting hit, and men were falling all over. I just saw it getting terrible pasting. We knew that they were after us. So we’re pulling our trucks with our guns. They didn’t go after our truck, but they’d come down sometimes and strafe the trucks and all in trying to keep us from going into position. But we finally arrived at Wahiawa.

Marcello: Do you have any trouble on that road? In other words, are there traffic jams, or is your way clear?

Nasser: Yes, because it was all military movement. There really wasn’t no civilians. At the same time, all these Japanese military who were planted there for years were out there somewhere giving directions to these planes. They had it well-planned. This was planned well.

Marcello: You didn’t see this, but these were things that you heard?

Nasser: No, but I know and I remember it in history, Dr. Marcello. In history when I was a kid, it said that one thing we had to do is watch Japan because they always had their eyes on the Philippine Islands. So we always had to keep our eyes on Japan because they had their eyes on the Philippine Islands. How simple it was! They ruined our Navy power and our air force. We were crippled, so the next step was the Philippine Islands. They did exactly what history told us as a kid.

Marcello: So that road is a monumental traffic jam?

Nasser: Oh, yes, yes. Well, confusion. So that gives them more time to do what they got to do, and we couldn’t get any action.

Marcello: So it was bumper to bumper traffic and so on on that road at that time.

Nasser: Oh, yes, yes. Wheeler Airfield was getting a terrible pasting. Not only Wheeler, but Hickam Airfield, too. Hickam Airfield was the big bomber thing, and they got a big pasting. Wheeler Airfield had the P-40s, I think--pursuit planes. Had they gotten up there and were alerted and got their

ammunitions and guns, believe me, the Japanese would have probably done some damage, but they got a lot of it, too. Anyway, we got to our battle position.

Marcello: Which was where?

Nasser: Wahiawa. That was it. That was our communication area.

Marcello: Right in the town or in the outskirts?

Nasser: Well, it was outside town at what they called in them days a CCC camp. There was a bunch of young kids there, and we had to move them out. They had to get out. But everybody was exposed to bombing, whether you were a civilian or a soldier or what, because they all lived on that island.

Marcello: What kind of a day was this in terms of weather and climate?

Nasser: Oh, the weather was just beautiful. It was warm, and that's what's good about Hawaii.

Marcello: How about the visibility that day?

Nasser: It was good--very good visibility.

Marcello: It was a great day for the Japanese if they wanted to stage an air attack.

Nasser: Oh, yes, yes. So we got into our battle position, and I'm going to tell you something that

transpired. I wrote the name down. I remember it now. We shot a plane down. Can you believe that?

Marcello: Okay, describe this.

Nasser: All right. Sergeant Lowell Klatte was our communications sergeant, and he was a very personal friend of mine--a big, heavy-set man who weighed about 200 pounds, blonde, jovial-type of guy and always laughed. He and his lieutenant, Saltzman, both had Browning Automatics, and that's like a machine gun. I had fired them, and if you put it to your shoulder--a guy like me--it would knock me down. They shot down a plane that landed about seventy-five yards from where I stand. I don't know whether they hit the pilot or hit the plane or what, and this plane nose-dived and went up into flames. Well, as soon as the flames subsided, I run over there to take a look, and there was the Japanese pilot and the one behind him. You know how a burnt piece of toast looks--black? That's the way they were. The thing that irked me more than anything was this. They had a decal. It was made, I think, in Dayton, Ohio. They had a decal to show that these planes were made in Dayton, Ohio--in our country--and shipped to them to use on us--probably

the motors. Now I heard Ed Jones [a Pearl Harbor Survivor] tell me about seeing a plane that had Goodyear tires. But, you see, as crazy as it is, people today are money happy, and they'll sell anything to kill your brother. So we made them the planes. We sent them the steel, if you'll remember. We used to send them steel.

In their years they'd been planning it. This just didn't happen on December 7. This had been happening for years--this plan to get at the United States. It was timely because we had to get into Europe. Roosevelt says, "How can we get into Europe unless something happens?" They knew this all the time. They knew that this could have been prevented. When they investigated Roosevelt, and then he died and they hushed it up. But I read in the American Legion magazine now where they're trying to tell that they knew this was going to happen and did nothing about it. And that is my version of it. My version is that we were sold out by our government. Now I don't care. I'm not a communist; I'm an American. That's the way I believe. I've talked to many people my age, and they believe the same thing. Now it's coming in the

American Legion and Disabled Veterans magazines. I'm a life member of these organizations.

Marcello: Describe what else you remember from that Japanese airplane that was shot down.

Nasser: The plane fell, and I got a bullet off of it. I think Sergeant Klatte, as it cooled off, took the machine gun off of it. I don't know where he's at. That's forty-six years ago. He might be living, and he might be dead. I don't know. We've had no communication. But he took the machine gun. The plane had burned. That night went on, and we were still out in the area waiting for anything to happen.

Finally, the second wave came in and got Pearl Harbor, as you've probably been told. At about 9:45 the damage was over, and they left.

Then darkness started coming on, and we're still out there. Word got around, and that's all you've got to do, is tell somebody: "They're dropping paratroopers!" Believe me, we were firing that night! We heard unlimited [simulates sound of ack-ack]. I don't know whether we did or not, but I heard some of our men were firing at other men

because they were so confused. It was dark--black--out, and you can’t see.

Marcello: I guess it wasn’t too safe to walk around that night.

Nasser: Well, let me tell you about this colonel. He was out there, and I was with my gun like everybody else. You couldn’t sleep because, you know, you’re thinking...if you’d hear a limb drop, we’d start firing. That was the last order we got--Japanese paratroopers--so they’re going to come in and take the island, which they could have--they could have. Now this colonel comes out, and he says, “Colonel So-and-so! Don’t shoot! Colonel So-and-so! Don’t shoot!” It was Colonel Young, I think, and he came out...man, if you walked out there and made a noise, you were gone, and they couldn’t do a thing with you. You could kill a colonel or whatever, because you had to identify yourself. Well, I understood his voice, and I wouldn’t shoot. But that’s the way it was, and everybody had their finger on the trigger. Not the gun--you had your finger on the trigger, and that’s the way it was.

Marcello: Had you dug foxholes or anything of that nature?

Nasser: No, no, no, we just stayed on top of the ground because we didn't have time to do that. They were flying at rooftop level. How could Lieutenant Saltzman and Lowell Klatte have shot that plane down if they was miles up in the air? We went to the firing range, and I became an expert with a rifle. I think we were shooting about 200 yards. Well, planes fly higher than 200 yards, and you've got trees.

Marcello: Now while you were out here at Wahiawa, I'm assuming that the attack is still going on, and what you're seeing is what is taking place at Wheeler Field.

Nasser: Yes, what's there and what we're hearing through communications.

Marcello: To get to Wheeler Field, are those planes coming over Wahiawa?

Nasser: Well, this fellow must have because he was trying to knock out our communication. So evidently they might have had an infiltrator there who said, "Look, there's an outfit over here with communications, and you ought to try to hit them." So they're feeding those people what to do, and while they're up there, they might as well go ahead

and take a chance; and when he took that chance, he didn’t make it. So that was two of them that didn’t go back.

Marcello: Saltzman and Klatte are firing back with BARs. How about the rest of the people? Are they firing, also?

Nasser: We fired with our Springfield rifles because it con go 200 yards at least. See, when you shoot a rifle, after 200 yards your projectile tumbles. When you shoot here, it’s going to go through here (gestures). But as it runs out of gas, it starts falling, so the impact is not that way, you see. That Browning Automatic is just like a machine gun. But, boy, it’s got a jolt, and this was a strong guy.

Marcello: When you were firing at these planes with your rifles, was this done in an organized manner? Was there a line of fire, or was everybody just scattered around?

Nasser: No, we were just scattered around. Oh, yes, everybody.

Marcello: And you’re firing at will?

Nasser: That’s right--firing at will. That’s exactly what we would do at the firing range.

Marcello: Approximately how many rounds do you think you fired?

Nasser: Golly, I got rid of both of my bandoleers.

Marcello: So we’re talking about easily l00 rounds of ammunition.

Nasser: Oh, yes, maybe 200 rounds. And that’s all night long.

Marcello: How’d your shoulder feel?

Nasser: Oh, it was tired, and I was tired and sleepy like everybody else. It’s an ordeal to go through something like that.

Marcello: Was a lot of that firing simply a way of venting frustration or helplessness in a sense?

Nasser: Well, I was never one that loved to fire a gun or anything, but I felt protected with it. If somebody comes, I’m sorry--bang. We were taught one thing--and I hate to say it; the Marines teach it more than us--”Kill or be killed.” And that is true. If you let him kill you, you’re not coming back. You want to come back, and you want the war to end. You want the war to end, and so do they. They’re the same way. I’m sure the Japanese--the actual guys who did it--didn’t want to go to war, but it was their country, so they had to go.

Marcello: In the meantime, while you're hear at Wahiawa, are the rest of your personnel filtering in? Maybe some more officers or some of the enlisted personnel and so on?

Nasser: Well, those that finally came in joined their outfit, because they knew where it was. That's what they told them up there: "Get back to your outfit! We're being attacked!" They had communications in the city on these cars. Like, the police come and say, "Earthquake! Get out of here! We're having an earthquake!" In a hurricane they say, "Get out of here to high ground!" And we have that down here. We have hurricanes, and the police go out and tell people to move, and that's it. So communication was as good as it could be, but a lot of people still didn't believe it, you see.

Marcello: How far was Wahiawa from Wheeler Field?

Nasser: I would say, oh, about maybe five miles or in that area. It was close; it was close. We had observation. One thing happened that night. I'll never forget this because it was blackout, you know. If you turn a light on, you can see it, right? Well, all of a sudden at one of the airfields, a light turned on. I think it was some planes coming

in. I remember that the attack subsided, I believe, at 9:45--that’s what it was. They lit the airfield because I think we were having planes coming in. I don’t know. I know that the airfield was just like sitting in a theater and the stage lights go on--all of a sudden. It’s dark and then the stage lights come on.

Marcello: But now the attack is over like 9:45 a.m.

Nasser: At 9:45 a.m., yes.

Marcello: So this is later on in the evening when these lights were turned on.

Nasser: Yes, yes, late at night--late at night. I believe we had some reinforcements coming in, but I don’t know how they...with the fields tore up and bombed and planes scattered all over and bodies laying all over, I don’t know what really happened. Someone there would have to explain that.

Marcello: Did you eat at all that day?

Nasser: Yes, we ate what we could, but you just wasn’t hungry. You were nervous, scared to death. I was scared. When they said paratroopers, then I was more alert then because that would be hand-to-hand battle with bayonets and everything. You know, we go to school, and we learn to do things.

Marcello: But you're still not trained as an infantryman as such, were you?

Nasser: No, we were secondary infantrymen. See, if all our guns were knocked out, we still were going to fire with our rifles. Even a Navy man, if he's got an armament, he's firing and he becomes an infantryman.

Marcello: In the meantime, what have you done with your artillery pieces? Have they been set up?

Nasser: Oh, yes, they were all set up. Oh, yes. But they couldn't use them because they had the thing at their control. Why fly up high when you can do more damage down low by strafing with machine guns as well as putting your bomb right where you want it?

Marcello: So what do you do in the days immediately following the attack?

Nasser: Well, we got our group together. Anywhere we went, we carried live ammunition on our safety. We carried our rifles and everything. If I went into town, I was fully armed.

Marcello: Did you essentially stay, however, in those positions there around Wahiawa?

Nasser: Yes, we stayed there for a short while after everything to all set and all, and then they moved us down to Pearl City, which is Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Now in those days immediately following the attack--maybe the next day or the next couple of days--did you have a chance to get anywhere near Wheeler Field to see what damage had been done there?

Nasser: Yes, yes, we did. It was terrible.

Marcello: Describe what you saw.

Nasser: Well, the bombers...you know, there was glass broken, planes...they still had to gather...I did see bodies laying all over, and it was sad. I didn't help in that avenue because they had the medical field and all out there, and then they had their own men. I don't know if some of those men were...I guess they were on Waikiki Beach on pass when this happened. It was just a mess. It was just like if I had dropped a bomb and this place goes up; and you're not in here, and when you come back, it's just like a fire. Buildings were smashed; planes were blown up. I wish I had a picture, really, to show it. My brother was in Hiroshima when they dropped the atom bomb, and some way or another my wife's got a picture of that. It killed 70,000

people. My brother gave me a black and white picture, and it was a sad thing because what you saw were houses with just nothing but ground. That's what an atom bomb does. The next war will be a nuclear war, and it might be headed over here. We don't know. You see, this attack, they thought, was going to come to California, and instead it hit Hawaii because that was their purpose.

Marcello: **What kinds of thoughts or feelings did you have when you saw that damage that had been done there at Wheeler?**

Nasser: **Well, I'll tell you truthfully. It is sickening. A lot of these children were much younger that me--seventeen and eighteen. We had a kid over there that was fourteen years old. He looked so big, but the finally discharged him. But it was sad because they became some of your buddies. You made friends regardless of where you'd go. It was sad.**

The other part that upset me was my family. I was worried more about my family getting the word. They had Schofield completely blacked out in the news media. So the phone call back home--as they told me--kept ringing every hour on the hour. They wanted to know if they had heard from Jim, which

is me. They said, “No, I haven’t heard.” Well, it was several days before they got communication from me. I’ve always told them this, and I tell my wife today, even with my heart attack: “As long as you don’t hear from me, you know I’m all right. If I end up shot, the Army’s going to let you know.” When I got hurt in Europe, they sent my dad a telegram. So they heard from me.

Marcello: How did you get word back to your folks that you were all right?

Nasser: I had sent a letter, and then I made a phone call. In those days you could get on a phone and call Hawaii or any places like that. It took me about four days. I made two phone calls. Prior to that, I made a record. Prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, somewhere around December 1 or something, I made a little record in Hawaii with the Hawaiian music background. I says, “Hi, Dad! Hi, Sister! Hi, Family! I’m over here on Waikiki Beach with this beautiful sunshine.” My sister still to this day has that record, and they played that record after they bombed Pearl Harbor, and it made them all cry because they heard my voice.

Marcello: I know that, at least among the Navy personnel, they were allowed to send home a little postcard which had several choices they could make, such as: "I am well," or "I was injured," or something along that line.

Nasser: Well, there was no restriction to writing in peacetime. After peacetime, then everything was censored. If you sent a picture or something, they'd cut it out. You couldn't give any military information as to where you were. See, Oahu is part of the Territory of Hawaii. That's where this happened. They think of Honolulu. They don't know that it's the island of Oahu; and it's T.H. (Territory of Hawaii). That's where it actually is. But Oahu is actually where Honolulu and Waikiki Beach is. Now if you tell a person, "I'm in Oahu," they don't know what you're talking about. If you tell them Honolulu or Waikiki Beach, they know what you're talking about.

Marcello: So after the attack was over and you were able to contact your folks, you were able to do it by means of telephone?

Nasser: I did make two telephone calls, and they were all glad to hear from me. I had to go, like, say, Monday

to make it so I could talk with them Friday. The operators would get everybody involved to be there at that time. Now it's--what--four hours difference? At 7:55 we got hit over there, which would be 11:55 here.

Marcello: How did your attitude toward the Japanese change now that all of this had been done? Can you look back and remember what your thoughts were at that time?

Nasser: Oh, I hated their guts. Yes, I despised their sneaking way, and it always made me think that the Orientals were sneaky. Now let me say this. When I first came to Hawaii in 1941...you have to be very careful because, see, Hawaii's got Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese; you've got real Hawaiians; you've got a mixture of both. And when you go on pass, there are certain streets you want to avoid because they told me--the Regular Army men that had been there two or three years prior to this--"If you don't watch out, a lot of them guys carry a knife, and they'll knife you." I was always aware. I always looked in the dark or wherever. We took a little Judo and stuff like that, and I could protect myself; and I used to box, you know. Every

time I'd look, I'd look behind me because a lot of these rascals might hate Americans. I don't know. They could be against America. A lot of people do hate us, you know.

But after that bombing, I lost my respect. Of course, you know they gathered up all of the Japanese and concentrated them and all. But today, in a sense, I look at why we got there, and I can't really blame Japan for bombing us. I blame Washington, D.C. for bombing us. When I came home, I read an article by Water Winchell, "Mr. and Mrs. America, wake up! Or your sons and fathers will be back in World War III!" It's the capitalists that cause a lot of this. So my philosophy is this: when they have a war, why not get Washington, Russia--their big shots--and put them in a field and fight their own battle and kill themselves. Don't kill your sons and kill my sons. Because that's what it's all about.

When I ended up in Germany, we would talk in those foxholes, and it was cold as the devil there. I was staff sergeant. I had a squad because I was a noncom. One guy said to me, "What are we doing here? What are we fighting for?" I says, "Because

Uncle Sam says we got to fight here." Why did I end up in Europe after that for a year?

Marcello: When did you finally get out of the Hawaiian Islands?

Nasser: Oh, I left there...I had a chance to come back to train men because of our experience, and I left there in 1943. I came to Riverside, California, and I was at Camp Hahn. Our camp was across from March Airfield, which is still there. Camp Hahn was a AAA. They modified their guns. The 3-inch guns became obsolete like the Springfield rifle. You have the M-1 now. I trained men over there so they'd know what they'd have to go through. It was called the 144th AAA. That's the outfit I was in--144th AAA Gun Battalion.

Then as time went along, Patton was on the move, so they sent all of us guys. We had fellows that was in the Air Force with no more infantry training...I went to Denton, Texas. That's why I know about Denton. So I went down there for brush-up infantry training. We were secondary infantry. There we learned bayonet work and everything the infantry would do--dig holes and live outside.

Then I was sent over to New York, and I got on the *Isle de France*. It was a luxury liner manned by the British troops. It was a troopship. I have to tell you one experience I had on that ship. We were entertained every night, and you will never guess who entertained us. He went over to entertain the troops! His name is Bing Crosby. Did you ever hear of him (chuckle)? Bing Crosby had a troupe, and he sang to us every night up on the rail. He stayed with the enlisted men. I'm an enlisted man, but I was a staff sergeant. He had his pipe there, and we'd both look over the rail, and we'd talk about it. I have to say this: his voice was richer in person than you'd hear him on a record or on movies. We got as far as Glasgow, Scotland, and I helped carry some of the instruments down and wished him well, and he went over to entertain the troops.

Then from Glasgow we went to England. We caught a train and went to England, and we went to Warminster, England, where they grouped us. We grouped our men to go to France. I think we left from Warminster, and I went to Bath, England, and then they finally sent us to Southampton. That's

where a lot of men embarked on D-Day. I missed D-Day.

Then we went over, and we hit Le Havre, France, and that city was completely bombed--I mean, house after house. We kept moving in. We went to Fountainbleau and Amiens, France. Fountainbleau was, I think, where Joan of Arc was burned at the stake. We went to Amiens. Winter started projecting. You're from Pennsylvania, so you know what winter is; but you don't see winters until you go over to Europe.

I went to Luxembourg and joined my outfit. I was with the 320th Infantry, and I was in the Battle of the Bulge. We dug down and we dug in, and we were a thousand yards from the Germans. That's how close we were. We could hear them, and they could hear us.

Marcello: **Is that where you got wounded?**

Nasser: **That's where I got hurt. Both of my legs were frozen. They were going to amputate both of my legs because if the blood don't circulate to your body, gangrene sets in. Anyway, we went out that Sunday morning. Now I don't understand an officer--where he gets these ideas to take out twelve men...and,**

thank God, we had this light machine gun section in the back. I'm in the infantry, and I'm right behind him. We're going through the snow, and that snow must have been to our hips, that's how high it was. We didn't have the clothes to wear out there. I had the same shoes. I didn't have snowshoes. I didn't have clothing that was worth a darn.

Anyway, we went out to knock out a machine gun squad that was holding our advancement because we were getting ready to attack at 4:30 the next morning. So he says, "Sergeant, get your squad together." Okay, I get them together. The lieutenant was ahead of me, and I was behind him; and we had about ten men and then the light machine gun squad in the back. So we go through this forest. We go through a gully and through some water. All of a sudden: [simulates sound of a machine gun]. A sniper hits this lieutenant's strap. You know, we had different helmets then. He was aiming at his head. The first person that they shoot is an officer. That's the brains, so if you get rid of him, then you demoralize the troops. The next one would have probably been me. So instead of hitting

him here (gesture), he hit his strap, and his helmet must have twisted ten times on his head. He hit the snow--we all hit it--and then word passed to put the machine gun squad section in that area where the shots came from. We must have got the German. He was dressed in white, and you can't see him, since it had been snowing. You come out and look, but you don't know whether it's a human being. But he was a sharpshooter, and we sprayed that whole area, and we said, "Let's get out of here!"

So help me, Dr. Marcello, if we hadn't have gotten out of there, they would have got all of us because here comes the mortars right in there and the 88s [88-millimeter], and those Germans could put those 88s in your hip pocket, they were that good. We got out of there, and I looked back, and, man, I saw that snow flying up. I says, "How lucky that we ended up back on our foxholes!"

That morning we were to get ready at 4:30 to make an attack. We were only a thousand yards...we tried to get them to fire. We did a lot of things over there in trying to find out where the enemy was to get them to fire back. At night the Germans

would come in and infiltrate with their burp guns. You could tell a burp gun from ours.

That night I went to my foxhole, and I had a fellow staying with me. I don’t know how he got in the service. He had a hearing aid in one ear, arthritis in both legs, and he was married and had eight kids at home. He was in the Air Force, and they stuck him in the infantry. He didn’t know any more about the infantry than the man in the moon. I says, “Get down! Don’t you hear them 88s coming?” You could hear a bomb coming because it had a whistle to it: [simulates whistling sound]. You could hear ours going [simulates different whistling sound]. You could tell which side was throwing which. We were down in the hole. I says, “You better get down!” He says, “I don’t care! Let one hit me, and then I’ll get it over with!” That’s the way a lot of them did. One fellow, during the bombing, jumped out of his foxhole and started screaming. I guess he just couldn’t take it. I don’t know what happened to him.

Marcello: So when did your legs get frozen?

Nasser: That night my feet started swelling, and I didn’t know what to think. It was dark, and you couldn’t

have a light. When you're in a foxhole, you're down this way, and then you dig in this way (gestures). I'm laying on branches that I made a bed to rest on. I untied my shoes and that relieved it, but I didn't know the swelling was going on. As I laid there, then the swelling kept going, and my feet started getting bigger. So I finally pulled my shoes off, and I just had my socks on.

Next morning the tech sergeant says, "Get ready to go--4:30!" I go to put my shoes on. Shoot, I couldn't get my foot in my shoe for love or money. So I says, "Call the medic." The medic looked, and he says, "You're not going. You've got frozen legs." So they got me some big shoes to slip on, and they sent me back to the rear echelon where we had a medical place with a doctor. So he put me up on the top bunk. They had a guy on the bottom bunk, and this kid was smoking cigarettes one after the other. He says, "I've got a fever. That's why I'm here." He says, "Don't tell them, but I'm going to smoke this. This builds fever." He just kept smoking one cigarette after the other. He didn't want to go on the line.

So all I did was just raise my legs up like the doctor said, trying to get the circulation. Well, instead, they got bigger. He said, “You’re not going back.” So he sent me to Paris, France, and in that hospital was German prisoners and Americans and British. They all had frozen arms, legs.

Finally, they shipped me by boat to Oxford, England, and I went to the U.S. 61st General Hospital, and that was my home for five months--flat on my back. There was nothing they could do. They put mineral spirits on, and my skin peeled off. They just looked to make sure gangrene didn’t set in. If it did they’d whack them off. I was praying to God, and that’s the way it was until blood finally did circulate. One guy lost his foot next to me. Gangrene set in. They save as much as they can.

Then after I got out and rehabilitated--wheelchair and then crutches--they finally sent me to an airplane glider outfit for rehabilitation. That was in France. I wasn’t there about a couple of weeks, and the captain calls me in, and he says, “Do you want to go home?” I says, “What are you

talking about? Everybody wants to go home!" They had the point system, and I had amassed a bunch of points, and I was one of the first three. I had just been in that outfit maybe a month. They had sent me to Marseilles, France, the embarkation point.

I caught the boat there, and there was something that occurred that irked me. We had on the ship a lot of food--beans, flour. When these ships get more food than they can feed the men, they catch the devil at the next point. So on the Atlantic Ocean my detail was to drop out hundreds of pounds of beans and flour into the ocean, so he wouldn't get caught and get bawled out. We dropped a lot of food. Back home we had rationing and stamps, gasoline rationing. You couldn't buy flour and sugar.

Then I got back to California right across from Alcatraz. It was Fort McDowell--right across from Alcatraz, which is closed now. That's where I stayed, and they finally brought me to San Francisco. Then I went back to Camp Atterbury near Indianapolis, Indiana. Fort Benjamin Harrison is

still there, but it’s not an induction center. It’s just there. That’s where I got inducted.

The lady said, “Have you got any claims against the government?” I said, “Well, I had a couple of frozen legs, but I’m tickled to death to get home.” She says, “Well, you ought to put a claim in.” So, thank God, I did. I get 40 percent disability, and I get attention. Every three months I have to go back and get my legs checked for blood circulation. I go back every three months, and they’ll help me. I’m service-connected.

I was state chairman of the Pearl Harbor Survivors one year. I was president of the New Orleans Chapter for two years. I’m a charter member of the New Orleans Chapter, which started, I think, back in 1962. It was conceived by some men in 1958, and there’s about 9,000 or 10,000 of us left. We’re a dying organization. We meet every two years at a national center, and every five years we go to Hawaii and pay our tributes to those that died. They were the heroes. We’re not, but we’re here to tell the story.

I tell my children, “Pray to God--that’s all you can do--that we don’t have war over here.

That’s what I try to say to my children. I’m a life member of the Disabled Veterans--I have been since 1951---and I belong to the American Legion. I belonged to the VFW, but I don’t now.

I’m a 32nd Degree Mason, and I’ve made the 33rd; but I had a heart attack from stress and tension. It’s a good organization because they believe in charity and hospitality. We have a Shrine Burn Unit. If your child gets burnt, you can go there for free. We help people in stress, tension.

I’m a peace-loving man, and I hope and pray to God that this country and the people will get along with each other. I’ve always said one thing: if they have a war, why don’t they get the people that want this war together and let them fight out their problems. Don’t get the innocent.

Marcello: Well, that’s probably a pretty good place to end this interview, Mr. Nasser. I want to thank you very much for your comments. You’ve said a lot of interesting and very important things, and I’m sure that historians and scholars will find your comments most useful.

Nasser: I'm glad to help you anytime. I'm donating flowers on December 6. I'm an Episcopalian. I've donated flowers, but December 6 is the day before December 7, which we are going to Lake Charles this year. We've got a helicopter all lined up, and we're going to have our ceremonies for those that lost their lives, and we're going to drop a wreath in the water in dedication to pay our respects to those seventeen, eighteen Pearl Harbor survivors who died here and those who died over there. So I dedicated the altar flowers in loving memory and the glory of God for those, my comrades, at Pearl Harbor--those who died and those who are still living.

Marcello: Well, again, thank you very much for your comments.

Nasser: Okay.

[End of interview]