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L. B. S M I T H  
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Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas  
Interviewer: Stephen Cruse  
Terms of Use: open  
Approved: L. B. Smith  
(Signature)  
Date: 2/20/89

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Oral History Collection

L.B. Smith

Interviewer: Stephen Cruse

Date: February 20, 1989

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Mr. Cruse: This is Stephen Cruse interviewing L. B. Smith. The interview is taking place on February 20, 1989, in Dallas, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Smith to get his reminiscences, experiences, and impressions while he was in the Army at Schofield Barracks near Pearl Harbor during the Japanese attack on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Smith, why don't we start by you telling me where you were born, when, and what kind of education you had up until you joined the Army.

Mr. Smith: I was born in Magnolia, Mississippi, on a farm. I went to high school in Magnolia and graduated from there. I was in my sophomore year in college at Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi, when I saw my draft number was going to come up, so a

friend of mine and I had decided to volunteer for the armed forces.

We entered the service in Jackson, Mississippi, and were shipped out from there to Fort Moultrie, South Carolina, and spent two weeks there waiting for a ship. We caught a ship from Fort Moultrie, South Carolina, to New York City. The name of the ship was the...oh, darn, I can't think of the name of it. But, anyway, we went on to New York and caught the Washington liner, which was on its maiden voyage carrying troops. And up until that time, they broke the record from New York City through the Panama Canal to San Francisco--in twelve days. Then we went to Hawaii and arrived there on about the twenty-sixth day of April, 1941.

Cruse: So up until this time, you just spent most of your time in the Army in transit.

Smith: That's right. I entered the service on March 17, 1941. I arrived in Hawaii on April 26, 1941.

Cruse: So you got your initial training there in Hawaii?

Smith: That is correct.

Cruse: What was your assignment?

Smith: My assignment there? I was in the infantry, heavy weapons company. Each battalion in the infantry has

a heavy weapons company, and I was in the heavy weapons company, Company 8. The heavy weapons company consisted of mortars and antitank weapons and that type of thing.

Cruse: I see. All right, so we're now talking about...you got there in April. What was it like? What was your routine?

Smith: I went through basic training, where they taught you all of the various basic fundamentals of the military service in the infantry. That's basically what we went through. At the time of the war, when this started, Pearl Harbor, I was a PFC (private first class).

Cruse: Did your training routine change as you got closer to December 7?

Smith: Yes. I had finished my basic training, and I was back in the company on a full-time basis. I had just finished up playing football. I played football on the regimental team. In that first year I played regimental football, and we just finished up there. The regular guys that was in the company had been going through some training. On the Monday following December 7, we were to go out on some maneuvers to work on some problems that they would present to us, and then we would come back with a type of offense to

overcome the situation. All of our firearms, including the belts of ammunition that we had there for the machine guns, including the ammunition we for your rifles and the .50-caliber machine guns, were all loaded with blanks because we were going out on these problem maneuvers the next day. They were all loaded with blank ammunition.

Cruse: At that time, in early December, how close were you keeping abreast of current events and world affairs?

Smith: Real close. Up until December 7, we felt like we were in the safest place in the world to be, really, because everything going on, all the fighting and everything, was going on in the other direction. So we felt like we were in the best position in the world, being out on the island of Oahu.

Cruse: Before you mentioned you played football. I understand that sports were an important part of the goings on at Schofield.

Smith: Oh, yes. They had baseball teams and football teams, and they did a lot of field events and things like that. It was real active in the sports area. That's correct.

Cruse: What other kinds of recreation did you enjoy? I assume you had weekend leaves and so on?

Smith: Yes. Normally, your big leave was payday weekend. That was the weekend that you got paid, and most of the guys would go down to Honolulu for the weekend.

Cruse: Was there any thought of the Japanese in Hawaii acting as fifth columnists or saboteurs before the attack?

Smith: Before the attack, no. As far as I was concerned, there was no indication of anything like that. We had none, no indication at all, that there was anything like that going on, as far as we were concerned. Now later on, after December 7, they found out that out in the cane fields they had arrows cut out in the cane fields pointing to all of the strategic targets on Oahu. All the pilots in the planes that they were flying overhead that day had to do was look down, and he could tell by these arrows in the field where to go. So there was that type of thing going on three at that time.

Cruse: So before the attack actually came, you felt safe.

Smith: Oh, yes, sure.

Cruse: Was there any sign that something was brewing, like, drills, special blackouts, or anything like that?

Smith: No, not that we could tell, other than the maneuvers we were going on, and we figured that goes on all the

time, you know, that type of thing. We'd go and do different things all the time for training.

Cruse: Okay, let's talk about the weekend of the attack. Do you remember anything about the Friday or Saturday before December 7?

Smith: Well, all I remember is just kind of an ordinary weekend with the exception that it was payday weekend. Those that had the money usually got leave, and they were gone for the weekend. There was four of us left in the barracks of a company of 140. There was four of us left in the barracks, and that's how many was there on the morning of December 7. A corporal that I reported to was there, and there were two more guys that were there beside myself.

Cruse: I've heard it said that the Japanese picked a perfect time to attack on Sunday morning because of the routine Pearl Harbor. Everybody was still gone from Saturday night.

Smith: On leave, that's correct.

Cruse: Okay, let's come to the morning of December 7 itself. What was the first thing you noticed about...when did you first notice that something was wrong?

Smith: It was on Sunday morning, and there were four of us in the barracks. I heard this clattering-like noise-



-B-B-B-BOOM! Then I'd hear it again. Then it sounded like you could hear a motor or something whining. So I went over to the window where I could see out, and I could see the street below, and I could see up in the sky. I saw a plane, and I could hear the noise, clatter, you know, and I could hear a bomb go off. Well, I went back over there and woke that corporal up. I said, "Say, man, there's something going on out here, man! I don't know what it is, but there's something going on! Sounds like an aircraft firing or bombs going off!" He said, "Oh, that's a sham battle. They do that all the time. They usually do it on Sundays, too." He said, "Don't worry about it. Go on back to sleep."

Shoot, I went back over to the window. About that time, one of those planes came down the street, and you could see the people going to Mass on the side of the street. They were going to church, which was located up this way (gesture). People were walking along the sidewalk, and the street here (gesture). The plane came down, and you could see the bullets kicking up concrete.

I went back over there and picked this book up. I just threw it out in the middle of the floor, and

I said, "Man, you can call that a sham battle if you want to! But there's something wrong!"

So, anyway, he got up and we went downstairs and couldn't get in the supply room. Neither the supply sergeant nor his assistant--neither one--were there, so we took the fire ax, which was right on the side of the door, and we cut the door down and got in. Then that's when we found out that everything was loaded with blanks. There wasn't a live piece of ammunition around there.

But, anyway, the other two guys came down, and after we had been there trying to decide what we were going to do about ammunition, they blew taps then to the effect that alerted everybody. Everybody began to show back up and all that. By noon most of them were back, out of Honolulu and everywhere else, you know. They were back at the barracks. But we got some ammunition off of one of the other regiments. We got some ammunition off of 35th Infantry Regiment, and this was during the morning. See, they kept on bombing and strafing until, I guess, about 11:00, about two-and-a-half, three hours, four hours, something like that. I don't remember the details.

But we shot down one plane that day with machine guns up on top of the roof of the barracks. Wheeler Field was real close. It was 300 yards from us. There was the airfield there about 300 yards away, and that's what they were bombing. They were bombing it, and they were strafing our barracks. They weren't bombing us, but they were strafing us.

Cruse: I've heard one person say that the reason they didn't want to bomb the barracks was that they were hoping to...

Smith: ...take them over, use them for themselves. That's correct.

Cruse: So I would imagine that during the course of that, you heard all sorts of rumors to the effect that they were landing and so on.

Smith: Oh, yes, we just heard everything. I forgot to tell you, but at that time I was in Company H, 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, 25th Division. That's what I was in. That's the organization I was with. After all the guys got back and we began to organize, we knew what we had to do. We knew that we had to get to our defensive position to which we were assigned. In case an attack like this occurred, we knew where we were supposed to go. Each one of the

infantry companies there on the island had a special assignment--the areas they would cover--and our particular area (and I'm talking about our company) was from the edge of Diamond Head on the east side to Makapuu Head. This was the area that we had to cover. We had to patrol those areas.

But that particular day, we got away from the company about noon, about 12:00, on our way to Diamond Head, and we began to set up defensive positions along the beaches and all that kind of stuff. Then later on, we began to patrol the area between Diamond Head and Makapuu Head, which was about fifteen miles, I guess.

Cruse: You mentioned that people were filing back. Was that normal for them to file back, or were they filing back in response to the attack?

Smith: To the attack, oh, yes. They were getting back any way they could come back--in taxicabs or they were getting people to bring them back. They were coming back on anything they could catch to come back on. That's the way they were getting back.

Cruse: So by noon you were pretty much back to normal.

Smith: Yes, that's when we began to move out. We began to move out about noon to our defensive positions.

Cruse: I imagine that was a pretty tense night--a lot of trigger-happy people.

Smith: Oh, yes. Some people got killed that night because of our people just not paying any attention. They'd just start shooting without paying any attention to anything. There were some people that got killed that night. That's correct. That's where you learned to be below the surface of the ground. You learned that the farther along you went into real combat. That's where you learned that at night you wanted to be below the surface of the ground. You never wanted to be above ground. Be below the surface of the ground because of the possibility of a grenade going off someplace or somebody shooting or people being exposed. You always wanted to be in a foxhole.

Cruse: During the time between the attack and noon, did you see a lot of confusion, or was it very organized?

Smith: Oh, yes, there was a lot of confusion. A lot of confusion, there sure was. We knew where we had to go, but it was just a lot of confusion. We hadn't had any training on what to take when we went out like this. We didn't know whether to take extra guns or extra ammunition or what to do or anything. Finally, we just bundled up everything we could and took off.

That's actually what we finally did. There was a lot of confusion. That is correct.

Cruse: I heard that, among other things, people were standing around waiting for their orders.

Smith: That's correct. That's correct. Some of the companies felt like that they...the big problem was that the regimental commander was late getting there, and the rest of them didn't know whether to go ahead with the procedures that they thought they knew that they should go with or not. There was a lot of confusion. You were correct.

Cruse: You mentioned that they were bombing Wheeler Field. They didn't drop any bombs on Schofield?

Smith: No, but they did drop bombs on Wheeler. It was about 300 yards from Schofield, I guess, something like that. It's not far, right off to the side there-- Wheeler Field.

Cruse: So all you got was strafing.

Smith: That's correct.

Cruse: How close did the strafing come to you where you were?

Smith: Well, I was on the top of the building, and he came over, and he tried to hit us. He got pretty close. I didn't get hit. In fact, we didn't have anybody that got hit that day. Nobody was hit that day.

Cruse: All right, now we're talking about after the attack, and you're stationed at Diamond Head.

Smith: Right.

Cruse: Besides people shooting, just trigger-happy shooting, did you see anything of interest?

Smith: No, nothing other than at night we dug in. We dug foxholes at night and got close to the ground because it was a little bit leery with trigger-happy people around and not used to being in combat--that kind of stuff.

Cruse: When you were firing at the planes...you said you got live ammunition from another regiment. How long did that take?

Smith: That was about an hour, hour-and-a-half. It was quite a time in there. If they wanted to, they could have landed on that island and just about taken it over if they would have done it during the time that they hit. But they didn't.

Cruse: So you spent about an hour trying to get ammunition and about two hours waiting for the rest of the company to assemble before you moved out?

Smith: Yes, that's right. That's correct.

Cruse: What did you think about the Japanese after the attack? Was there a lot of resentment toward the Japanese on Hawaii?

Smith: Yes, sir. Oh, yes. We heard a lot of scuttlebutt, you know, rumors and various other things. I wasn't involved in any of them. They found some Japanese that had radio contact with the people that dropped the bombs on the island and that kind of stuff. They found the radios and all that kind of stuff.

I'd just like to mention that eventually, when we took over along the beaches, our job along then was to defend the shores of Oahu. To do that we built what we called concertina, which was rolled barbed wire rolled around and tied together every so often. It looked like an accordion. You would take those and anchor them out in the water. In case a boat or anything came ashore, they would get tangled up in it. That's what we did.

We also took over all the homes, which usually they belonged to people that lived in the States, along the shoreline. We took those homes all over. Those people were shipped out to the States. I lived in Doris Duke's home for about a month, and I lived in Mr. Fleischmann's home, founder of Fleischmann's



Yeast. His home was there. I lived in his home for...I don't know...must have been six or eight months.

Cruse: So you stayed at Diamond Head for...

Smith: We stayed out there for about eight months. Then during the last four months...we left out on about one year to the day from the time the war started. But during that four months we went into training. Then we left that island. On December 6, 1942, is when I left that island.

Cruse: Were there any alarms during that time you were out there on Diamond Head besides those right after the attack?

Smith: Oh, yes, we'd have them occasionally. We'd have them occasionally, yes. If one of our planes coming in from the States didn't properly radio in or if his radio was out, that type of a thing would get an alarm.

Cruse: The maneuvers that were to have transpired the Monday after the attack...were those going to be pretty much the same thing that you actually did, or did you know what they were?

Smith: No, it wasn't. It was just kind of a two-day fire problem, really, is what it was. It was kind of a two-day fire problem. It wasn't a real big maneuver or anything like that. It was just a short deal.

Cruse: Okay, before you mentioned that after you moved out December--a year later--and you mentioned that you saw action at several other places. Why don't you tell me about those--where you went?

Smith: I left Hawaii on December 6. We went by way of the Fiji Islands and stopped off there for one day. Then we landed at Guadalcanal on the last day of the year. On the 31st day of December we landed on Guadalcanal. Then starting about the 10th of January of 1943, we began relieving the Marines--my whole regiment plus two more regiments. We began relieving the Marines on Guadalcanal, and we had to clean up on Guadalcanal--the Japanese that were left there. We had to clean them up, which was real tough fighting--real tough. We lost a lot of good men there. There was some tough fighting there. It was our first exposure to jungle fighting, and jungle fighting is something we had never had any training in. We didn't know anything about it, and we had to learn how to fight in the jungle, which is entirely different from ordinary fighting. There was no comparison to it. Most of the time, you can't see the enemy. He's back in the bushes or up in a tree or someplace else. Anyway, it was a different-type thing than what we were accustomed to.

Anyway, we finished up that job, and then we left Guadalcanal right after that, landed in the northern Solomons, which was 180 miles from Guadalcanal at Munda. The Japanese had an air base on Munda Island, and we landed, I guess, twenty miles from there and went across land. We finally finished up the job there. We had to take about three more islands besides the field. We had to take three more islands there, but we finally wound up with that--finished that up.

Then we went to New Caledonia for rest and recuperation. We unloaded down there, I guess, a day after Thanksgiving. We unloaded in 1943, and we stayed there until about the 10th of January of 1944. When we left there, and we went from there to New Caledonia and went into training. At that time they transferred me into a battalion intelligence operation, and I was the senior enlisted man involved in that. We trained from the latter part of January all the way up until, I guess, in December of that year. We trained for almost eleven months there. The men that were assigned to me...and this was a new deal. They had never tried having intelligence attached to a battalion before. Anyway, the guys that were assigned to me in this special intelligence group were real high key people,

so they would make it a lot easier for me. The only thing they had to do was learn the fundamentals of how you do it. A lot of times what we would do is send a guy out on patrol with one chocolate bar, and that's all the food we would give him. He would have to go to a certain area and cover an area of about 200 miles and come back and live off the land. They had to learn how to do that. You had to do a lot of other things, too.

Anyway, after we had been through all this training and all, then we hit the Philippines. We landed at Lingayen Gulf in the Philippines on January 11, 1945. That's D-Day plus three. In other words, the initial landing was three days ahead of when we landed there. We went down the middle part of the Philippines to a little town named San Jose, and then we turned east and had to go back up into the mountains and run out the Japs up in the mountains, and that was real tough fighting. We lost a lot of good men in that area, too. I lost one man. We went behind the line sixty-three times in the Philippines, and I got one man killed and got two men wounded-- behind the line sixty-three times.

Now we didn't go back there to fight; we went back there to get information. We'd have to get information, like, what type clothes they were wearing, how big they were, how fast they were walking, what kind of firearms did they have, and all that little stuff like that. By having this information, you could tell who it was. You can tell the difference between a Japanese soldier and a Marine on size, because the Marines were always picked to be guys that were six feet tall. You don't see too many Japanese soldiers that are six feet tall. But the Marines were always six feet tall or better. They were big guys. That's the reason you had to judge their height and all that.

Cruse: You'd bring that information back?

Smith: We'd wait alongside trails at night, and the Japs would be coming by. I mean, there'd be just a hundred of them. They would be coming by, and you'd lay on the side of the trail, and you're sitting there counting them as they go by. Sometimes you spent time up in trees in the Philippines. A big ol' valley came down like this (gesture) with trees growing on both sides. There was a river down below. You would get up in the trees where you could see--get up there and

sit up there all day. You would be up in this tree. We sat up there all day, and we would count the number of soldiers that would come down to the river to get water, take a bath--things like that. We would observe them all day, keep a count of them, and then take that count and try to figure out how many troops were up on the other side of the river--that type of stuff. But it was real interesting.

But after a period of time you get careless. I had been over there quite some time. I had been over there at that time almost four years. I had been away from home all that time, and that was our fourth combat. You began to get a little careless, and you began to do things that you shouldn't have done, and I could see that. I'd take a short cut when I shouldn't have taken a short cut in order to get back off of some of those long patrols. I'd take a short cut and expose my troops to unnecessary gunfire or something like that. So I decided that when they came out with the new system of sending you home...I had enough points that I could come home, so I got out. I came back home in...I guess it was...I left from over there, oh, about the 10th of June in 1945, and

I was discharged in Fort Atterbury, Indiana, on July 31, 1945.

Cruse: Okay, you said that at Schofield your unit consisted of about 140 men?

Smith: Company, yes. At that time I was in the heavy weapons company. Each one of the battalions had a heavy weapons company, and I was in H Company, which is a heavy weapons company.

Cruse: Was that normal-sized?

Smith: Yes, it was a normal-sized company at that time. Just before that...I mean, this is in all your history books and everything else pertaining to that out there. But on October 1, they had gone to a new-type division. It was called a triangle division. That's where, instead of having the old square division, like we had before, which consisted of four regiments, they went to one that had three regiments. We had the 35th Infantry Regiment; we had the 25th Infantry Regiment, which they formed on October 1, 1941. That had only been in effect only a month and seven days. There was another regiment there. The old Hawaiian Regiment was the third one. When the war came along a lot of them that were in the Hawaiian Regiment were Japanese. Well, they pulled those out. They sent them over to

Europe, and then they brought in the 161st out of Washington State. So that was the three regiments that were in our division: 161st, 35th, and the 27th. That's the three regiments in the 25th Infantry Division.

Cruse: Did the size of the companies grow after the war started?

Smith: No, they stayed about the same. That's about all you can handle in a company--about 140 in a company. You had four companies in a battalion. You got four companies. Start down here, and this is A, B, C, D. D is heavy weapons. Then you got E, F, G, and H. So in the 2nd Battalion you would have these four companies. Each one of them would have 140.

Cruse: Okay, is there anything else that you would like to add?

Smith: No, other than I appreciate the opportunity of relating and recording my experiences in Hawaii and World War II. I certainly do thank you and the group at North Texas for giving me this opportunity to pass this on.

Cruse: Well, we appreciate your comments.

Smith: If there's anything else that you come up with between now and the time you edit...I understand we'll edit



this, according to what it says here (gesture). I'll  
be glad to help you out any way I can.

Cruse: We appreciate that.

[End of interview]