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Robinson R. Norris  
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Oral History Collection

Colonel Robinson Norris

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: El Paso, Texas

Date: June 12, 1976

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Robinson Norris for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on June 12, 1976, in El Paso, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Norris in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was stationed at Fort Shafter during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the surrounding military facilities on December 7, 1941.

Now Colonel Norris, to begin this interview, would you just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Norris: Well, I was born in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1917 and moved to South Carolina, where I spent most of my young life. I graduated from a place called Calhoun Falls High School and went two years to Clemson University, whereupon I received an appointment to the Military Academy at West Point.

I entered there in 1936, graduating in 1940. In our class we were called to active duty a month and a half early, in August of 1940, whereupon I reported early to Fort Monroe, Virginia, staying at the school about a month and a half, and then shipped out from Brooklyn, New York, to Hawaii, where I arrived in November of 1940.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of having duty in the Hawaiian Islands?

Norris: Well, as you might know, the graduates of the Military Academy are given their choices of available assignments, based upon their academic rating in class. In my case I chose the Air Defense, and due to the fact that I only ranked 130, I believe, out of 445, I was not able to get my first choice, which was the Philippines, but I was able to be assigned to Hawaii, which was my second choice.

Marcello: Where did you go when you got to the Hawaiian Islands?

Norris: When I reported, I was met, of course, as all lieutenants were in those days. Everyone knew that you were coming months before. There weren't many lieutenants coming in, and most of them came from West Point in those days. I was met and I went directly to Fort Shafter and joined the 64th Coast Artillery--antiaircraft. At that time the headquarters of the Hawaiian Department was located at Fort Shafter in what they called "Big Shafter." We were stationed across a

gulch in what was known as "Little Shafter," which was the home of the 64th Coast Artillery.

Marcello: What exactly was your function when you arrived there as a new second lieutenant?

Norris: Well, I was assigned to a firing battery which was a 90-millimeter gun battery. I'm mistaken. I've gone through so much, I've forgotten. It was the old 3-inch gun battery, Battery B of the 64th Coast Artillery. My battery commander was a first lieutenant, and he had the luxury that wasn't too often incurred out there by having another lieutenant in his battery.

Marcello: In other words, this gave him a little bit of authority whereby he didn't have to do some of the less desirable details and so on.

Norris: He was battery commander, and I was everything else--mess officer, supply officer, range officer, and everything that went along with being second lieutenant.

Marcello: Okay, what exactly was the function of this particular coast artillery battery?

Norris: Well, it was the mobile air defense for Pearl Harbor, whereas there were some fixed antiaircraft guns at places like Fort Kamehameha and around Pearl Harbor and Ford Island and what-have-you. Our job was to have field positions, and our unit was mobile with the armament normally stored on the post.

Upon maneuvers or on alerts, we went out to pre-arranged field positions.

Marcello: What was the morale like in that pre-Pearl Harbor Army? Or I guess I should perhaps be even more specific and ask what was the morale like in your particular unit prior to the war.

Norris: Oh, the 64th Coast Artillery looked upon itself as being the elite of the Army--the best antiaircraft regiment in the Army. I forget the name of the trophy that was awarded each year for the firing of the best score, but they frequently won that. As far as I can recall, the esprit de corps in the unit was really very high.

Marcello: How do you account for the high esprit de corps?

Norris: Relatively little turnover . . . a good place to serve . . . I think, generally, high caliber of the enlisted men. They were well-trained, and they took pride in their unit.

Marcello: At that particular time, I gather that the Army, as well as the other military services, were rather selective in whom they accepted even as enlisted men.

Norris: I really can't comment too much on that except to say that they were very selective in who was promoted to private first class or corporal. There used to be a standing joke there that anyone who made corporal in his first enlistment of three years was really an outstanding soldier.

Marcello: I've heard before that promotion in that pre-World War II Army was very, very slow.

Norris: Not only that, but as I recall, a man getting promoted to sergeant out in Hawaii, upon returning to the United States did not necessarily bring his rank with him. So this was another incentive for soldiers who made corporal or sergeant to remain out there for some period of time, and it was not unusual at all to have corporals with eight or ten years of service think they were doing all right, actually.

Marcello: Describe what the training routine would be like here at this battery in those months, let's say, immediately prior to December 7, 1941. What would a routine training exercise consist of?

Norris: Well, by today's standards the antiaircraft weapons were very basic. We had mechanical directors; we had optical range-finders; and we had hand-loading 3-inch antiaircraft pieces that had to be rammed home by hand. So in general, insofar as the air defense training was concerned, it was broken down really into two basic segments--a range section and a gun section. We had four 3-inch guns per battery, and we had a mechanical director, but I can't recall the name--the nomenclature--on it. To go along with the director and connected to it for the transmission of range was an optical range or height-finder, as it was called.

. So usually the training consisted of tracking targets of opportunity that flew by. Sometimes they would be pre-arranged targets where altitudes are known in order to check

the accuracy of the height-finder. Manual tracking of the targets, transmission of the predicted data to the guns, giving commands to fire, and manually loading the guns. Insofar as armament training, that's about the general nature of it.

Marcello: Was this sort of routine a daily thing, or did it occur on a rather regular basis?

Norris: We had, as I recall, gun drills each day for approximately an hour or more. Now the specialists--the height-finder operators and the director operators--may have had more time. It really didn't require that much daily training to train gun crews. But you had to keep your eyes in shape, particularly because it was a stereoscopic range-finder--height-finder--and if you weren't good at it, there wasn't a chance of hitting the target, really.

Marcello: Did this routine change any as one got closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate?

Norris: I can't recall that air defense training in itself was stepped up in any way, really. We considered ourselves to be well-trained and presumably ready to go on an instant's notice, though we may have been restricted, not known to me, being only a second lieutenant. There may have been more field exercises desirable, but unfortunately the positions



that we had to defend Pearl Harbor were located in sugar cane fields. The "powers" that were out in Hawaii at the time didn't particularly care to give permission to having their cane fields ruined by running antiaircraft guns through and around them. It was necessary, as I understood it, to get permission each time we went out on the field exercise. The government did not own, as I recall, our field positions but leased them when we did go out on pre-arranged maneuvers. I don't know, other than a little bit of special training that took place on Saturday prior to Pearl Harbor . . . I can't recall them changing the routine at all.

Marcello: Was this a fairly modern weapon for its time?

Norris: It was kind of in the transition stage. It was as modern as the Army had. Even before or around Pearl Harbor--I can't recall exactly when--we did get a SEF-264 or something like that--one of the very early cumbersome models of combination early warning and fire control radar--out there. But it was some time before 90-millimeter guns came in.

Marcello: Okay, let's change the subject briefly and talk about another area. What was the social life like for a young second lieutenant in the Hawaiian Islands at that particular time?

Norris: The 64th Coast Artillery was an old regular Army regiment. It adhered to all the customs and courtesies of the service. They had periodic regimental parties. Everybody went--was expected to go. The officers . . . all the lieutenants were

supposed to dance with colonel's wife and do their amenities. There was the normal entertainment of post friends, but not a great deal of social life. In my own case, I was a bachelor, and bachelor quarters were not available on the post at Fort Shafter. So my place of residence was all the way across Honolulu right off the edge of Fort DeRussy, which from Fort Shafter was really across the main part of Honolulu and approximately ten miles away. I, along with a lieutenant that graduated with the Class of '40 from Texas A & M and one other Thomason Act officer, I believe, rented an apartment and lived there. We had our own private life insofar as bachelors. And girls, the beaches were loaded with them.

Marcello: I understand that entertaining could be a rather formal affair during that pre-Pearl Harbor Army. Is that correct? That is, the social functions that you as an officer were more-or-less to attend and this sort of thing.

Norris: Well, we had regimental parties, but they weren't lavish affairs. They were by today's standards very formal. Even though second lieutenants made only \$125 a month, each one of us had to have formal civilian evening wear. We always wore a white coat, bow tie, stiff shirt, and tux trousers, and they were prescribed at all regimental functions. They were rather formal but not too frequent. Everybody was expected to go and have a good excuse if you didn't go.

Marcello: I have one further question I need to pursue with regard to the social life, and I think it's a very important question. I think it's one that I need to have you more or less set the record straight on. Many people say, or many people contend, that if the Japanese or any other potential enemy were going to mount an attack on the military installations in the Hawaiian Islands, that the best time to have done this would have been on a Sunday morning, simply because Saturday nights were one great big party throughout the islands. Now how would you answer that particular assertion? The implication is, of course, that the men would not be in any condition to fight the next day.

Norris: I would say that there was practically no validity to that comment whatsoever. Of course, being a bachelor and very young and a lot of time having transpired, but I never recall by today's standards or since that time, that there was any more consumption of alcoholic beverages. . . as a matter of fact, to me, as far as I know, it was less. Saturday nights are usually nights during which social events took place, but insofar as anybody whooping it up all night long, I have no knowledge of anything of that sort at all.

As a matter of fact, I don't recall what time I went to bed the Saturday night before Pearl Harbor, but it was no . . . when the alert came, it first didn't strike me as

unusual. We did this all the time. I was eight or ten miles away and, I would guess, probably the better part of twenty miles from Pearl Harbor and the better part of ten miles from Fort Shafter to where I lived. I received the alert call, as did my roommate, and we jumped up and took off for the post and got to the post without even realizing that there was anything going on down there. It was a routine type of an affair.

Marcello: Okay, this is getting a little bit ahead of our story, but we'll come back and talk about this because obviously it is very important. How did the liberty routine work for the officers at your particular post during that pre-Pearl Harbor period? In other words, I'm just not that familiar with how the liberty routine would work for officers. Obviously there would have to be some officers that would pull the weekend duty at one time or another. Just in your own case, how would this operate?

Norris: Well, everyone had to pull what was known as staff duty officer all around the clock, but other than the fact that there might be an alert on or a maneuver on or some special restrictions on, once the working day was over you were permitted to go to your quarters. You did not have to, unless you were on duty, check in every so often. In other words, there were no special restrictions unless you had some off normal duty hour type-duty to remain on call.

Marcello: As conditions continued to worsen between the United States and Japan, did the frequency of your alerts increase, or was it mainly the usual routine?

Norris: I think I partially answered that question before, or at least I was talking about this. I don't want to get ahead of your sequence of events, but until the Friday before Pearl Harbor when a special alert came down--not looked upon at the time to be unusual either--and then later called off, I don't recall any additional developments to the field. We went and had target practice three times a year. We went out and occupied field positions for the purpose of setting up and orienting. Several times a year we went to the ammunition storage place, several times a year, to familiarize the people with loading and unloading the ammunition and bringing it to the site.

Now I might interject something here which is hearsay that possibly could have had some kind of an effect upon this. At the time I was in Hawaii, General Short was the commanding general of the Hawaiian Department, and if my memory is right, he succeeded a man by the name of General Herron. Now that must have been in the early part of '40 or the late part of '39, but I'm not sure which. But at some time when Intelligence reputedly had word that the Japanese fleet had sailed out of their normal area of maneuvers in

and around the Marshall or Gilbert Islands, the Marianas, or somewhere down there, General Herron, either on his own or on orders from higher up, ordered an alert. Now whether they went and occupied field positions, I'm not sure, but among other things they did do that I'm aware of, which created a great deal of local civilian consternation, was that live ammunition was issued. This met with apparently a great deal of resistance and alarm by the local populace.

I know that there were, by my experiences later on with live ammunition, strange restrictions put upon it. In my own case, I can recall having a case of .45-caliber ball ammunition that was drawn and opened. And once opened from a sealed can, ordnance would accept it back. I had to keep this under lock-and-key and periodically count the number of rounds that were left there until it was finally disposed of. Now my recollection--and this again is partially hearsay--is that General Herron was maybe kicked in the pants, perhaps, for taking the bull by the horns and acting on his own, but this again is nothing more than my recollection of what I was told by people who may or may not have known what they were talking about.

But I know everyone was jittery about live ammunition and possibly could have influenced the higher people--General Short or others--to be a little bit more reserved in ordering out their troops for additional real-life-type of exercises, see.

Marcello: You've brought up General Short's name. What was the scuttlebutt going around about General Short? What sort of an opinion did the other officers have of him? What was the word on General Short?

Norris: I really don't think that I can make a valid comment on this. In those days, there was a tremendous gulf between the second lieutenant and the three-star general--much, much more than exists today. He was, as far as we were concerned, in the ivory tower of the throne, and we saw relatively little of him. Just by accident, I happened to personally know his son who was a cadet at West Point a year or two behind me. But I don't recall that I ever personally met General Short. He, in his responsibilities--commanding the Hawaiian Department--we were, though a regiment, a relatively small part of his command. I have no recollection of anyone thinking that he was the greatest that there ever was or the worst that there was. I just have no real feelings on that question.

Marcello: In other words, I guess, as far as you were concerned as a second lieutenant, General Short was almost somebody that was rather impersonal.

Norris: He was the commander from whom came the orders, but through our regimental commander. We had really no contact with him. I saw him on many occasions, but I can't say that I even specifically ever remember talking to him.

Marcello: As conditions continued to deteriorate between the United States and Japan, did you and your fellow officers ever speculate very much about the possibility of the Japanese ever attacking the Hawaiian Islands?

Norris: There's some question there. I was a young fellow, and there's some question as to how serious and mature I was at that particular time and whether there were other things insofar as military was concerned, such as doing well on target practice, and so far as social life--girlfriends--or having a good time that interested and took up your first thoughts. I know that while I was a cadet at West Point in the period from '36 to '40, there was a great deal of Ivy League demonstrations against the United States becoming involved in the European fracas. In later years, I became, as a major, the S-3 of the 64th Coast Artillery regiment. In the files--in the safe--was a scenario which the S-3 at the time, who later turned out to be a General Frederick, had written. While it was a classified document, it portrayed--time-wise, place-wise, date-wise--as accurately, to my recollection, as any historian could have written about what transpired at Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: When was General Frederick writing? Do you recall the year?

Norris: He was the regimental S-3 as a major when I first came to the regiment. So what the Japanese did both in regard to time, the phasing of their attack, and the places in which they



struck, was so similar to what he had written up as a war game field exercise sort of a thing that it would almost make one think that he had extrasensory perception or something, or that he was particularly brilliant, or perhaps that was the way to do it. That was the best way to do it--as he saw it and they saw it.

Marcello: Okay, I think this brings us up to the days immediately prior to the actual attack itself. What I want you to do at this point is to reconstruct in as much detail as you can remember what your routine was on Saturday, December 6, 1941. After you go through that particular period, then we'll go into December 7, 1941, and try and reconstruct it in the same manner. Let's start with December 6th first of all. Can you remember what your routine was on the 6th from the time you got up until you went to bed that night?

Norris: If I may, I would like to tell you something else bearing upon my particular status on that day that also may cast some light on some of the previous questions you've asked about the anticipation of an attack on Pearl Harbor or the anticipation of the Japanese making war against us. I don't recall exactly what time, but somewhere around November 1st of 1941, I and a classmate of mine were called down to regimental headquarters. We were sworn to secrecy. We were told that we could select--each of us--any fifteen men that we wanted

from the entire regiment, subject to certain job-type descriptions--supply, this, that, and the other. We would outfit them, and in the very near future we would be assigned to go to Christmas Island and Canton Island respectively and set up and organize a defense of those particular islands. We went through this exercise; we outfitted our troops; and I was given something like a two-week leave in which I went over to the big island, Hawaii, to the Army rest camp to have a pre-embarkation vacation, and I came back to Oahu somewhere around the . . . either the latter part of November or the first, second, or third of December. I just don't remember, but it was so close to Pearl Harbor. I think it was around the first of December. And I was to be prepared to go. I don't remember whether we had dates at that time, but it seemed to me that one of us was supposed to sail out around the seventh of December and the other was supposed to sail out around the fourteenth of December--something of this sort. I did this, I mean, I took the vacation.

I came back, and my own personal life was rather complicated. At the time, when I got back to Honolulu around the first of December, I received a telegram from one of my West Point classmates, a very good friend, asking me if I would be kind enough to meet his wife on the Lurline that was scheduled to come in, I believe, on 3 December, and find her a place to live because he, in line with the augmentation.

was coming over on the troopship. Dependents weren't authorized to come on at that time, so he brought her over at private expense. But I was sworn to secrecy.

I did meet the girl who walked down the gangplank with six-months' baby in her arm, followed by a Negro maid from Virginia that she'd brought along as extra baggage and a great big collie in the hold of the ship. I had to find someplace for her to stay until he was supposed to arrive, I believe, on the thirteenth of December. I did. I was lucky enough to have a classmate who was married and lived on Fort Shafter and had quarters larger than they really needed, and I got her to put this girl, her baby, and Negro maid up, along with the dog (chuckle). He just happened to be the other officer--the classmate that I mentioned--along with me who was supposed to go to Christmas and Canton Island.

Now this brings me personal-wise up into the area of the question I think that you asked--what was my routine on Saturday. I'd like to preface it also by one more comment having to do with alerts or extra training that occurred prior to this particular Saturday that you're speaking about. On Friday around noon, as I recall, about eleven o'clock or one o'clock, it was routine for us to have what was referred to as officers' call and officers' school.

Either between eleven and twelve o'clock or between one and two o'clock--I can't remember which--an alert came down. This came to us as a general air defense alert. The meeting immediately broke up; all troops and officers reported to their gun parks and started hooking up equipment. The word came down, "The alert is off." In its place we were told that we would report in on Saturday morning, which was not normally a working day. We usually worked a five-day week. We were to report in on Saturday morning, acquaint ourselves with the field manual--the training manual--on riot control, and we were told to double the guard against sabotage and things of this sort.

Marcello: Was sabotage considered to be a potentially serious problem, given the tremendous number of people of Japanese ancestry on the islands?

Norris: Again, my comment on that problem would not be worth much. I would say, yes, it was considered to be a threat because there was considerable anti-Japanese animosity, most of which, I'm sure, took place after the war started. But there was probably as much in Hawaii as in the United States. I never did learn how to tell the difference between a Japanese, a Chinese, a Korean, and the mixtures of them that were on the island. As far as I knew, though I had lived somewhat of a sheltered life from the community, there was little

racial mistrust and hatred or discrimination. I'm sure that some of them were economically in the lower classes and all that, but nobody raised an eyebrow about whether somebody was one race or another. I think this was the case. Now I'm up to the basic question that you asked-- what did we do on Saturday?

Marcello: Right.

Norris: Well, we came to work on Saturday, and we practiced with fixed bayonets, the squad wedges, how to disperse mobs. The guards were, to my recollection, doubled; they were secured around places that counted. We spent the morning in this sort of thing, and in the afternoon we knocked off. Now insofar as training or any other special precautions or arrangements that were being made for any earlier occupation of the field sites to fire air defense, there may have been some, but I wasn't in position to know about it.

Just as a kind of a sidelight, this classmate, whose wife I met, had asked me to find them a place or rent them a place to live, which I wasn't about to do. I took the alternative of billeting her with a classmate's wife. After training was over on Saturday morning, I took her out on a kind of a real estate tour of Honolulu. I did this for orientation purposes for her to get some idea of where she might want to live because he was supposed to be, as I

recall, stationed at Fort Kamehameha. Among other places that I took her were to some houses that weren't too far from Fort Kamahameha and which presented a picturesque view of Pearl Harbor. In retrospect, I can remember getting up to the top of the hill in Aiea Heights and getting out to look down on Pearl Harbor and remarking to her that in all the time that I had been in Hawaii--which was at that time a little more than a year--I had never seen anything like as many ships docked in the harbor. I don't recall what I did Saturday night.

Marcello: To the best of your knowledge, did you retire relatively early that evening?

Norris: I can't remember a thing unusual at all about that evening. My normal routine, unless I was on duty and had to be on the post, would be to come home by six o'clock or something of this sort. Fort DeRussy is out in Waikiki. We usually made our own breakfast at home. We ate lunch at the mess on the post. We usually went out for dinner. I just don't recall what I did. If I had to guess, I would say I probably took this classmate's wife out to dinner. But I don't remember doing it--nothing unusual. When the phone rang on Sunday morning, everything was so much routine that I don't recall anything spectacular about it and wasn't even aware until I was practically at Fort Shafter and saw bursts in the sky and planes swooping over out in that direction. That was when I was first aware of what was going on.

Marcello: Okay, so on this Sunday morning you do get the call from Fort Shafter, and again I want you to pick up the story at this point--from the time you got the call until you got to your post and the events that took place thereafter.

Norris: By the time of the attack and between the time that I described my initial assignment where I was the second officer in Battery B, which was a firing battery, I was transferred to Headquarters, Battery to Command Headquarters Battery, to be battalion adjutant and battalion supply officer and what-have-you. I had been promoted to first lieutenant at that time. Well, my job, amongst others in running Headquarters Battery insofar as it pertained to tactical operations, was to set up the command post, establish communications with all of the firing batteries. In our case, as I recall, our command post was on the post at Fort Shafter, so I did not have to deploy out to the field.

I came in and, of course, the attack had started prior to anyone being alerted. The time and space factors involved in the regiment limbering up, putting guns in traveling position, limbering them up and driving them out to field positions, which in some cases were twenty or thirty miles away, it was manifestly impossible for any of the batteries in the 64th Coast Artillery to get to their field positions, send and draw ammunition which was locked up in Aliamanu Crater, and have any kind of effect whatsoever on what was

going on.

Now it may be a poor effort on my part, but I've often said in talking about it that under our set of circumstances, having to keep our armament on the post and removing in some cases twenty-thirty miles from, as I recall, field positions --some were closer--and with the restrictions placed upon the issuance of ammunition and the time to check it out and load it, break it open, and have it ready for service, that conservatively the Japanese could have radioed three hours ahead and said in no code or anything else and nothing to be confirmed, "We are going to attack you. We're on our way." I don't believe that from our field positions we would have fired a shot.

Marcello: Now was this standard Army routine at this time?

Norris: No, there were a number of . . . I don't recall historically the number of Japanese planes that were alleged to have been shot down.

Marcello: There were twenty-nine shot down altogether.

Norris: There were some fixed air defense armament. I don't know if there was any over at Fort Ruger--or if that's too far--or at Kamehameha. As I recall, there was some at Kamehameha. I believe there was some on Ford Island and maybe a few others. I don't know what the Army shot down versus what the Navy shot down, but I know we didn't shoot down anything because



we were parked on our post and not in field positions. We were in no position to do it.

Marcello: So what did you do all during the attack, then--simply stay there and await further orders?

Norris: Well, as soon as it was possible, we put our armament out on position. Historically, I don't recall how long it was before we were all, as a regiment, prepared for action. We had our armament, which, in addition to the 3-inch guns, consisted of machine guns, too. We had a so-called search-light battalion, a couple of batteries; we had a gun battalion; and we had a machine gun battalion in the regiment. I just don't remember how long it was before--ours was the gun battalion--they were in position and ready to fire, but obviously we did it as quickly as we could. Because not knowing what the situation was and being such a mess, we didn't know but what they would be back. We did get ready as quick as possible, but I don't remember how long that was.

I do know that upon my arrival at Fort Shafter and not knowing exactly what was going on, I climbed on top of one of the little one-story barracks for a little bit better view, and I probably came as close to getting killed as I did in the whole war by a 5-inch Navy shell that apparently was fired at rather low elevation without the fuse being cut.

It sailed by my ear and hit the building right next to me and killed three or four of our soldiers. Actually, the 64th did nothing to block the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Well, as you mentioned, you didn't have any ammunition, so there wasn't a whole lot that you really could do.

Norris: Well, our guns weren't out on site, and that was logistically . . . at the earliest, I figure that to have assembled the men, limbered them up, taken them out to positions, drawn ammunition, gotten the battery and the directors oriented would have, I think, taken three hours. This would have been a conservative estimate.

Marcello: In the meantime, what sort of emotions were you experiencing? Was it mainly one of frustration? Inquiry? "What's going on?"

Norris: Well, probably a combination of all. "This can't really be so," sort of an attitude. Though this shell that I referred to was not just the only one, the Navy was, of course, getting the brunt of the attack, and they were really in no position to order supplies, obviously, too. They were being hit, and they were in no position to fire, I guess, accurately. They were just firing away, and, of course, the countryside got sprayed with their air defense armament which was, as I remember, 5-inch guns at the time. Now I'm sure they did do some good and no doubt accounted for the majority of the planes that you say that were shot down.

I just don't remember. But they were shooting like mad, I know, but really I don't think too effectively or too accurately. But I would say the main thought was, "It really can't be so! It isn't happening! You can't do this to us!" sort of a thing.

Marcello: So what did you do in the aftermath of the attack? Let's say after the Japanese had left.

Norris: Well, all that we did was to occupy on a permanent basis all of our sites with ammunition. For days, it seemed to me, up until the Battle of Midway, we practically stood around with ammunition in hand, though I seriously doubt if there was a Jap within a thousand miles of there. In my non-technical opinion, all of the stories with respect to the capability and accuracy of radar and early warning were greatly exaggerated.

Marcello: I think that was the case especially during that period when radar was more or less still in its primitive stages yet.

Norris: Well, it not only was in primitive stages, but I, as an officer whom they had no reason, I'm sure, to question even my loyalty, trustworthiness, or reliability, was not even permitted to go by the road on the site of the first radar that we got in the regiment, it being so closely held. I guess there was in the Signal Corps, as I remember at the time, the news story that came out about the individual warning

that there was a flight on the way. That may or may not have been true. I have no knowledge of that whatsoever. I heard it but I was inclined to doubt the veracity of it . . . certainly not the veracity of the fact that the report was submitted, but the reliability of the information that was transmitted. Because several years after this . . . well, maybe not several years, but when radar became more common, in the early stages we had literally hundreds of false alerts. We were tracking phantoms--backtracking. There were all sorts of bugs in the equipment and the lack of understanding and the lack of refinement of the equipment. So it's not surprising to me that even if this individual did report, as the newspapers, I think, once said, that an attack was coming in that someone might have taken it with a grain of salt (chuckle) and not have been convinced that there was any such thing. But as I mentioned earlier, I don't really know whether that was true or not. It's all hearsay as far as I'm concerned.

Marcello: I'm sure that in the aftermath of the attack there were all sorts of rumors floating around as to what the Japanese were going to be doing next.

Norris: Well, as a peacetime Army goes in those days when there was the peace offensive and everything and all the restrictions and the limited budget and, to a degree, antiquated equipment

and what-have-you, I think that if intelligence had been good and if we had been permitted to operate in a realistic fashion, we would have given a good credit of ourselves.

You asked about rumors. Yes, there were rumors that floated all over the place. One of the most harassing things when I was still Headquarters Battery commander in the command post was reports from civilians that there were people doing this and people doing that. I remember one in particular. We were driven crazy with false reports. Some lady called in and said, "There is a Japanese hanging from a parachute in a tree in my backyard." Of course, if you asked a lady, "Are you sure?" then they become indignant. In this particular case, I remember, we dispatched a couple of people out, and all it was was a parachute flare that some airplane had dropped. It had been hanging in the tree for the last six months, and she never even noticed it. This sort of thing.

Of course, I think it is a truism to say that until someone has been in combat--a unit has been in combat--that it really is not up to its potential. You have to learn to work as a team, know what to expect of other individuals, and you become a unit after you once have fought. There was a lot of confusion, blackouts, people who in the excitement did not use good judgment. People were jumpy. They'd shoot at any kind of a noise without thinking--the normal sorts

of things when people are first exposed to some kind of danger. We had some unfortunate instances, but by-and-large things settled down pretty quick except the harassment of, in our case, standing around day and night with ammunition in hand and not really being confident that we would have had any kind of early warning so that we could relax. Five minutes would have been a great break. If we could have sat down and relaxed just on the site where you could get to your weapon in one minute or something of this sort, it would have been a big break over what we had (chuckle). But after the Battle of Midway, things seemed to loosen up a little bit.

Marcello: Well, that more or less exhausts my questions. Is there anything else that you would like to add to the record that we neglected to talk about?

Norris: No. Without having any reliable information, but putting two and two together, it was my opinion that both General Short, whom I did not know, as I mentioned, or Admiral Kimmel, whom I also did not know, were sacrificial lambs. I find it extremely difficult to believe that, as the press generally recorded or at least insinuated, and as later reports seem to insinuate, that both Admiral Kimmel and General Short were forewarned that an attack was coming or was imminent. I find it difficult to believe that that's true.

The alternative seems to be either treason on one hand or nothing short of utter stupidity on the other hand. Having seen them, heard them talk, and seen them act, I don't believe that they would do this. I don't certainly think they were guilty of any sense of treason, so my guess is that they received some type of information that was subject to much interpretation. Perhaps, because of the falderol that I mentioned earlier about General Herron and creating such a stir, they may have acted in a more than usual conservative fashion. Of course, always there's never any excuse, if you're a commander, to be surprised--never any acceptable excuse. But I do think that they got the short end of the stick (chuckle). At least that's my impression.

Marcello: Well, I think that's a pretty good place to end this interview, and I want to thank you very much for taking time to talk to me on such short notice. You've said a lot of very interesting things and, I think, very important things, and I think that scholars are going to find this material quite useful someday.

Norris: Well, I hope they realize that the part that I tried to qualify with just impressions or not personal factual information is well set apart because some of the things that I said of feel are impressions not specifically anchored to fact. I was a young, immature, inexperienced Army officer at the time, and I was not privy to the real facts that bear upon the question of who's at fault.