

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
NUMBER
214

Interview with
Leon F. Painter
June 7, 1974

Place of Interview: Fort Worth, Texas
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
Terms of Use: Open
Approved: Leon F. Painter
Date: June 7, 1974

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Oral History Collection

Leon Painter

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Fort Worth, Texas Date: June 8, 1974

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Leon Painter for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on June 8, 1974, in Fort Worth, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Painter in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was at the Marine Barracks between Hickam Field and Pearl Harbor during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Now Mr. Painter, 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, your occupation--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Painter: Alright. I was born April 5, 1921, in Denison, Texas. I served an apprenticeship in sheet metal work in my younger years. I quit school in the ninth grade. I went into the service when I had

just turned . . . I believe it was eighteen, nineteen probably. I had just turned nineteen. I spent six years in the United States Marine Corps.

Marcello: Going back just a little bit, why did you decide to enter the service?

Painter: The reason probably is that it was back in really hard times, and being in the part of Texas I was in, I'll tell you, a dollar was really a dollar in those days. I had served a portion of an apprenticeship in sheet metal work in Denison, Texas, and I had a friend in Pueblo, Colorado, that had a business. So I went out there, and I got into some furnace work to finish out on this apprenticeship. I left there and came back, but I came to Dallas instead of Denison. I finally got a job in a sheet metal shop and was pretty secure. It was a non-union shop. Of course, in those days there were very few unions.

Marcello: Especially in Dallas.

Painter: Especially in Dallas (chuckle). This is true. There was a termite company there that had called me and said that they were putting in a sheet metal shop. I really didn't understand what their purpose was

at that time, and it was simply because the other sheet metal workers and tin shops were using their patent on the termite shield--the Stone Termite Shield.

Marcello: This is a shield--a termite shield?

Painter: It was a termite shield that they used at that time. They don't use it in this time of the century. I went to work for them. Then I found out of what type of work they were doing, and it wasn't right and I quit. But then when I tried to go back to another sheet metal shop, which they needed people and they needed me, but they didn't need me as bad as this because of what I had done. They'd want to know, "Where did you work for last?" I said, "Stone Termite Shield." So in essence I bit the hand that fed me innocently. That's what I did.

So I thought, "Well, I'll join the service." I wore glasses. Not all the time, but I did wear glasses. I made the mistake of . . . when I went to the Post Office, the Navy was my first choice. I walked in, and they said, "You wear glasses. We cannot take you. The concussion of the big guns and all would shatter your glasses, so we can't take you." I thanked them and walked out.

I went to the second floor, and I saw the sign of the Army recruiter. I stuck my head in, and there was a . . . I guess he was a sergeant. He was red-headed and freckled-faced, and his freckles were as big as baseballs. I asked him if I was too tall and ugly to get in the Army. He just laughed and he said, "I believe you are." So I thought, "Well, that's good enough. Maybe I'd better leave now." But he was real friendly, and, of course, I know that what I said, it wasn't offensive to him or anything.

And I thought, "Well, I may be lucky." So I started out the Post Office door, and there was a Marine coming in. I thought, "Well, what I said to the sergeant, the Army sergeant, I'll probably get the same answer from the Marine, this Marine recruiting officer or enlisted man." Whatever he was. I don't remember what rank he was. So I made this same remark: if I was too tall and ugly to get in the Marine Corps. He says, "Hell, no!" and grabbed me by the arm. We went on up, and I signed up. I think in about four or five days they shipped me out to San Diego.

Marcello: I gather that it was sometimes pretty tough to get in the service during that period. The service was highly selective.

Painter: Well, really I said that in three or four days I was off to San Diego. I wasn't, because I was three pounds underweight. They turned me down, but the sergeant there told me, "Come back in three or four days and keep your weight checked." So I went back, and they turned me down again. I was maybe three pounds underweight, might have been two and a half, I don't remember, but I was . . . that didn't seem like that would be right, but that's what they turned me down on. So the sergeant told me, "I want you to come back at a certain date." He told me this away from the doctor. He says, "Just before you come up here," he said, "down below is a drugstore." He says, "Go in there and buy you a half of a cantaloupe and come on up, but before you get up here, drink as much water as you can drink." He says, "There's a fountain out there," he says, "so drink and drink and drink and then come directly to me, and I'll weigh you immediately." (chuckle) So I did that, and I think I was a half of a pound underweight, so they accepted me in the Marine Corps.

Marcello: What date are we talking about here? When did you enlist in the Marine Corps?

Painter: July 18, 1940.

Marcello: And as you mentioned awhile ago, you took your boot training at San Diego, California?

Painter: San Diego, yes.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened during your boot training that you think ought to be a part of the record?

Painter: Not really. I guess we had our ups and downs. We had drill instructors that . . . really, I can look back on them now or even after boot camp training and see that what they told us was correct. The men that was in our platoon in boot camp, we thought that we had it rough, and we did. The others would be lolling around, sitting around, or standing around doing nothing, and we were actually out there beating our brains out. When you're running the bayonet course in deep sand practically up to your knees, hot and dry, and with a heavy marching order on them, you have the drill instructor there with a forty-inch stick--and they still should use that forty-inch stick today because it's darn good discipline--those things I can remember. Our drill

instructors told us, "Well, you think that we're rough on you. Think of how we must have felt when we went through Parris Island way back there when." They were a good twenty, maybe twenty-five, years our senior.

But they said, "Someday you will appreciate this." I'll tell you, I have appreciated it a lot, and I can look back and see that they were right. I love discipline. I've lived by it all of my life. We don't have enough discipline in the United States today. No way do we have it.

Marcello: I assume that most of the career servicemen at that time, regardless of branch, had a great many years in the service, did they not?

Painter: Yes. Our top kick had . . . I think he was crowding his thirtieth year. He was a drill instructor.

Marcello: And rank was pretty slow at that time, was it not?

Painter: He was a staff sergeant. That's all. He should have been way up there, but he was . . . he reminded me of an old Army mule and even smelled like one. Sergeant Raymond. That's the first time I've thought of his name in many, many years.

Marcello: When did you leave boot camp?

Painter: We had, I believe it was sixty days, and they had cut it short. We were supposed to have ninety days. Now we may have gone over sixty days, but they were cutting it short. About that same time, they started taking in some reserves for training. I don't know. There was a lot.

We had some good officers. I specifically remember one, a Lieutenant Randell. He was a first lieutenant, and he came out of West Point. You still have to admire some or the majority of the West Pointers. I did. We had some that came up through rank that I admired, too, because they were good men. This Lieutenant Randell was an expert on bayonet. I've seen him make some mighty good-sized men--heavy-set, strong, and could even be brutal--make them so mad that they would try to stab him with his bayonet, but they'd always wind up on the ground with their own bayonet pointing at their throat. Of course, this is all training.

And to go back again to discipline, you do a lot better when you don't get mad. You're thinking and that's what they were trying to impregnate into our minds. Just to think and you live longer. I don't know if I did too much thinking, but I am

still living (chuckle). I don't know. That was, of course, out of boot camp there.

Marcello: When did you leave San Diego?

Painter: Oh, gracious! We were at Pearl Harbor . . . I believe it must have been the 28th or the . . . sometime in the last part of October because they didn't have enough . . . when we got there, we were in two-men tents alongside the parade ground at the Marine Barracks. That was between Hickam Field and the harbor.

Marcello: Now this is October of 1940?

Painter: Yes.

Marcello: 1940. In other words, you were there a little over a year before the attack actually occurred?

Painter: No. I must have made a mistake there then. I meant '41 instead of '40. Because we . . . reflecting back, I was thinking that we were possibly there about five or six weeks before the attack. And I believe it was around the 27th that we landed there. I'm not quite sure on that date.

Marcello: Did you go directly from San Diego to the Hawaiian Islands?

Painter: Yes. We went on the . . . good gracious, it used to be an old luxury liner. I can't think of the name of it.

Marcello: It wasn't the Lurline, was it?

Painter: No. The Wharton.

Marcello: Was this duty in the Hawaiian Islands voluntary, or were you simply assigned there?

Painter: We were assigned there.

Marcello: What did you think about going to the Hawaiian Islands?

Painter: I'll tell you, I just don't think it really made any difference. Of course, probably at that time, we was very anxious to see it. We probably, or I probably, thought that there weren't any buildings or it wasn't civilized. I don't know what I really thought. I knew that we were going to Hawaii, and naturally I would want to go to Hawaii.

Marcello: Did you conjure up visions of some sort of a tropical paradise or something of that nature?

Painter: No, but I'll tell you. I can still see "Hilo Hattie." She was a lovely person. She visited our base many, many times and brought her troupe and just . . . you could say almost that she was a mother to everyone out there. The song is, "When 'Hilo Hattie' Does the Hula Hop." That's really the . . . of course, that was her theme. That was her dance. That was it for her. They came out quite often

to entertain us. I know we enjoyed that.

Marcello: There are a couple of other questions that I think I need to have the answer to before we actually talk about your activities in the Hawaiian Islands. You mentioned awhile ago that your boot camp did not last as long as the Marine boot camp normally lasted. Was this because things were getting so tense at that time, so far as the international situation was concerned, that they felt they had to rush you through and get you to your permanent assignment?

Painter: It possibly could have been, but naturally with us in there, we never give it any thought.

Marcello: At the same time you also mentioned that there was a relatively large influx of reserves coming into San Diego at this time.

Painter: Yes, there was a whole lot coming in.

Marcello: And again, this seems to be another indication that preparations were being rushed, let us say, for the eventuality of war.

Painter: I don't think I stated that I was in Company A, 2nd Engineering Battalion.

Marcello: And this is the same group that you stayed with when you got into the Hawaiian Islands?

Painter: Clear through my tour of the service, until I came back to the States. My last year, I drove a bus in Jacksonville, North Carolina, until my tour of duty was over.

Marcello: As a young Marine, how closely were you keeping abreast with world affairs?

Painter: Probably very, very little. I do know that just before the attack, I'd bought a newspaper. I don't know. It was the Honolulu Chronicle or something. I don't remember the name of it, but I'd bought it from one of the little Kanaka boys who come by every Sunday morning. I was looking at the front page where President Roosevelt was talking to some Japanese embassy man here, and I don't remember what his name was, and we were assured that Japan wouldn't be our enemies or anything. They wouldn't interfere with us in any way. Then all of the sudden it all broke loose.

Marcello: Would you say that generally speaking that most people expected war to come in Europe, if it did come at all, so far as the United States was concerned?

Painter: I don't think that anyone expected it . . . although, I'll tell you . . . of course, I guess it was through

military training that our officers and our drill instructors would always speak, "If we get in a war . . . if we get in a war . . ." Of course, the purpose of the service is training, train men to be soldiers, and train soldiers to be men. That's something I can truly admire about the Marine Corps.

Marcello: Where did you go after you got to the Hawaiian Islands? In other words, where was your base . . . did it have a name? We know that it was located between Hickam and Pearl.

Painter: We were right there in . . . I guess it would just be in the Naval base there. We would have to be in the Naval base. Of course, we were at the Marine Barracks or out on the parade ground.

Marcello: Describe what your barracks and the Marine base was like there.

Painter: The barracks was more in an L-shape, I believe, and then the ball diamond was--we called it the ball diamond--the parade ground was dirt. It wasn't hot-topped or black-topped or concrete or anything, but it was all dirt. There was a pretty nice ball diamond out there. Really, every Sunday morning Hickam Field would have a mock air raid, and I've

actually seen men who would have to fall because the planes would come over so close. A lot of the time they'd throw . . . it looked like they'd throw little flour bags out or something. Of course, the ballplayers would shake their fists at them and wave their bats and (chuckle) maybe try to throw a ball and hit them or something. But that's what I thought had happened.

The barracks were long, and we faced . . . I would call it the north barracks. We had the company street there. One nice thing about it. We'd always get close to the mess hall. Marines are good for that.

This Sunday morning, there was a sergeant by the name of . . . well, we heard all this noise, and I got up . . . as I said, I was reading in the paper . . .

Marcello: Before we get on to this, I've a lot of other questions to ask.

Painter: Oh, all right.

Marcello: I don't want to get on the attack itself yet.

Painter: Okay. Okay.

Marcello: I just wanted you to describe what the actual Marine quarters here at this base were.

Painter: As far as the barracks, they looked like any Marine Corps barracks or Army barracks. These were long. They were two-storied. They were composition shingles which . . . there's another reflection about during the attack and seeing the strafing of the . . . this one plane strafing the barracks there that I saw. I don't know. There's not really too much to tell about a barracks.

Marcello: How many Marines are we talking about at this particular location?

Painter: In our company I would say there must have been around 136. I'm not sure.

Marcello: How many Marines were there in total? You'd probably have to estimate this, of course.

Painter: I don't have any . . . I don't have any idea of how many Marines there was on that base . . .

Marcello: What was your particular rank at this time?

Painter: I was corporal, I believe.

Marcello: And did you have a particular specialty?

Painter: Yes, I was a "Cat" driver or did carpenter work. That was our purpose for being over there because we were engineers, and we were to build . . . we were sent there specifically to build a base. We

called this base . . . after the attack, we finally went out to the area and cleared it of cactus. We had to have bulldozers go in before we could even walk in because of the cactus and the underbrush and all. It was all over a lava bed. But our purpose was to build a base, and this is what we did. It took us six months, I believe, to build this base.

Marcello: In other words, your housing here on the Naval base itself was kind of temporary in a way.

Painter: Yes . . .

Marcello: You were going to remain there until the new base was finally constructed.

Painter: Yes, and until we got all of our equipment and supplies and things.

Marcello: During this period prior to Pearl Harbor, what would a typical day be like for a Marine here?

Painter: In the United States?

Marcello: No, in Pearl Harbor.

Painter: In Pearl Harbor?

Marcello: Yes. Like you say, you were there from October right up on through the attack and perhaps even after that.

Painter: We had very little to do that month or six months before the attack. Now the other Marines, I don't

know what their functions were. I know what our functions were. When we were in San Diego . . . we were constantly always working on construction. We were construction people, but we were combat engineers. We had to be because we didn't like fighting (chuckle). We had an excellent outfit. I don't know of anyone that I disliked, even officers possibly, with the exception of one. He just tried to walk us to death is all.

Marcello: What sort of special alerts or maneuvers were undertaken by the Marines and the rest of the servicemen here on the islands in the weeks immediately prior to the attack?

Painter: I don't know really that there was any other than what I read afterwards. I do know that the only time that anyone had ammunition was when they'd change the guard. They'd change the clips, which was usual practice. I understand that the only ones that had any ammunition was aboard ships, and most of it was for target practice.

Marcello: In other words, as a combat engineer you didn't have anything to do with the actual security of the base or anything of this nature?

Painter: Oh, no, definitely not.

Marcello: You never had to pull guard duty or anything of that sort?

Painter: Oh, yes, we always pulled some kind of a guard duty. It didn't make any difference if you was guarding an empty tent. They had to keep you alert. They had to keep you moving, keep you from getting fat. There wouldn't be any purpose for you if they let you lay around.

Marcello: Generally speaking then, as one gets closer and closer to Pearl Harbor, there was really no great change in your routine.

Painter: No, not really. Before we went to Pearl Harbor, we built Camp Elliot in San Diego. Now we started it; we didn't complete it. We did a tremendous amount of the dirty work, and from there we went to . . . this is north of San Diego. From there we shipped out to Hawaii--Honolulu. I guess we got a heck of a lot . . . well, as far as Camp Elliot goes, they were forming our company at this time, and I don't believe that there were over five or six two-men tents and a bunch of cactus and prairie rattlers, and I was one of the first ones out there. I don't think that we even had two dozen men at the

time that we went out there. It was a pitiful-looking sight to see a vast prairie with a half of a dozen two-men tents on it. This is where we got a lot of training, and then they shipped us . . . we formed our companies and our battalion and then shipped out to Pearl Harbor. Colonel Elmer E. Hall . . . he was a tall, heavy, stern . . . one of the finest officers that God ever made. There is nothing he wouldn't do for you to help you, and if you were just a little bit wrong, he would try to right it for you and to help you. He's done it on many, many occasions. He helped me on one occasion that I certainly appreciated. I think he retired after Tarawa, or he came back to the United States simply because he disobeyed orders. He went ashore and he was supposed to stay aboard ship, and he said, "I will go where my men go." They gave him a reprimand, sent him back to the United States, and made him a brigadier general. I imagine that he retired as that. He was a fine man. He . . . oh, something else. He was an enlisted man in World War I.

Even in our company, we had one man that went through World War I with Colonel Hall. I always

called him Colonel. That's what I know him as. Colonel Hall went up, and the other man's name is Conyers. We called him "Pop" Conyers. He chewed tobacco. He had no teeth, and they tried to get him to retire, and he would not retire. He would stay, and he was as active as anyone, and he knew his business. He was in maintenance. He was our maintenance sergeant. I've heard him tell officers, "Get out of my compound." I've heard him tell Colonel Hall, "Get out of my compound." "Pop" Conyers was nothing but . . . I think he was a staff sergeant. Of course, he was constantly . . . he was fighting on the wrong side of the fence, and that's the reason he didn't come up the way that Colonel Hall did.

Marcello: In other words, these were all individuals that were in your engineering outfit at the time you shipped out for the Hawaiian Islands?

Painter: Yes. "Pop" Conyers was of a different company, but he was maintenance . . . but he was still of the 2nd Engineering Battalion. We were all a part. Different companies. We had different specialties.

Marcello: Now the Hawaiian Islands have a relatively large population of Japanese ancestry. Did you or your buddies ever give much thought to these people in

those days prior to Pearl Harbor? In other words, did you ever look upon them as some sort of a threat . . .

Painter: No.

Marcello: . . . with regard to sabotage or fifth columnist activities or anything of this nature?

Painter: No, but during some of our tours, especially going up on the Pali and looking out over, you could see the Japanese working their little plots. They looked like small plots from there, but they had probably had a good bit of acreage in them. You could admire that they were very good farmers. It was all neat, and they did most of their work by hand. They pulled the weeds by hand, but they probably had large families and all, and they could work their plots that way. They were good . . . I always thought they were good farmers.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese, what was the sort of person you usually conjured up in your own mind?

Painter: Oh, over there we called anyone that wasn't white, we call them a Kanaka or any . . . there's a lot of names that we called them (chuckle). Even after we got to the islands, what we would call some of

the natives, they turned around and learned the English word and would call it back to us (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you feel that in case of a war that you would be pretty secure there at Pearl Harbor or on the Hawaiian Islands?

Painter: It never entered my mind. I never thought about it. Probably what I thought of most was to get the job done and get to the canteen after work or to write letters or play poker or go into town.

Marcello: What sort of liberty did you receive while you were here on the Naval Base in these weeks prior to Pearl Harbor?

Painter: I imagine there was very few bars that I hadn't been in. We tried to make all of them, and a good many of them twice, three times (chuckle).

Marcello: I gather that Hotel Street must have been on your route.

Painter: Well, that's always . . . that's probably the first thing on the agenda (chuckle). I remember one time that . . . you know, you're so used to standing in line that on the first liberty going in, it was . . . and we really never thought anything about, "Well, this is a line." We were in the

habit of standing in line, so, heck, we saw a line here. There was two or three of us standing there. "What are we standing in this line for?" The line come several feet down from the corner, and it turned the corner. One of the fellows says . . . I think he called it the Honolulu Hotel, but I think it was Canal Street. That's where all the hotels were on. So we got out of that and started making the bars. I don't know. We may have come back later, but I don't remember going back later to there.

Marcello: How hard was it to get liberty?

Painter: It wasn't hard. You had liberty, I guess, so far as I remember now, probably every evening or after a certain hour. There were certain times we could get liberty. Now immediately after the attack, there was no liberty. We stayed on the base, but a few weeks after that we were given liberty.

Marcello: In other words, in those weeks prior to Pearl Harbor you received liberty almost every evening unless you had the duty or something.

Painter: Anytime you wanted it. Yes, unless you were standing guard duty or you had some specific job to do. Liberty was no problem.

Marcello: How about on weekends? How tough was it to get leave on weekends? Let's say a weekend pass.

Painter: No trouble. Seventy-two's were pretty easy to get. If you had a good reason, you could even get someone to do your duty for you if you had guard duty. Usually, the top kick and officers would . . . well, our top kick was the main man. What he said went. If you had good enough reason, you could get it.

Marcello: And I gather this routine also did not change any in those days leading up to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor?

Painter: No. We had . . . I don't know. Our company was formed a few men at a time, and everyone seemed to get along with each other. Of course, your . . . if you have one big family like that, you're going to have your spiffs and you're going to have your fights and disagreements, but you might wind up going to liberty with him that same night. We didn't hate each other. We worked with each other all the time. We knew we had to. We disagreed with each other. Sure, we're always going to do that. We may not like the job that we were doing and get a transfer to another job.

Marcello: Generally speaking, on a weekend--and you would have to estimate this, I'm sure--what percentage of the Marine personnel would be off the base?

Painter: I imagine 75 per cent, I would say. I don't have any idea, but I know that a base is deserted. You might say it was deserted. You have your guards, and there's no milling around. There's very little done at the canteen. Of course, the canteens are always busy, but most of the activity takes place in town.

Marcello: Normally speaking, would most people usually come back on the base even on weekends even if they had leave for the . . . even if they had a seventy-two-hour pass, let's say?

Painter: Yes, I've done it myself.

Marcello: I assume that the base was so close to town that it was much cheaper to live on the base than to go to the YMCA or some hotel in Honolulu.

Painter: I don't know. We didn't think too much about the \$18 a month that we got. Of course, we did get a tremendous raise at one time. They raised us up to \$21. That was a big raise.

Marcello: When was payday, incidentally?

Painter: We used to get paid every two weeks. I think it was after . . .

Marcello: Would it be the 15th and the 30th or the 1st and the 15th?

Painter: Yes. Now this was back in San Diego, and we would pay out . . . I think it was \$1.25 or it may have been \$.75 that we paid for our own insurance, and then finally they cut that out. They cut that out after we went overseas. We lived on it. We got our room and board.

Marcello: When you got to the Hawaiian Islands, do you remember when you got paid?

Painter: No, I don't. Most of us always let some money ride on the books, even when we was making \$18 a month. You may let \$1.50 or \$2.00 ride on the books. Several days before pay call, you'd say, "Well, I want to draw so much money." They'd come around and ask you how much money did you want to draw, and then you'd let it ride on the books.

Marcello: And then they would simply deduct that from your pay the next time around?

Painter: Yes.

Marcello: Do you recall if you had a lot of money during that

weekend of December 7?

Painter: I think I must have had. I don't know exactly what I had, but our intentions that night was to go in and to make as many bars as we could make.

Marcello: Let's talk about the day of Saturday, December 6, 1941. What I want you to do is to describe to me in as much detail as you can remember what your routine was on Saturday, December 6, 1941, and then from there we'll move into Sunday, December 7, 1941.

Painter: As far as Saturday, I don't . . . we hardly ever did anything on Saturday other than to clean up around our camp and get our equipment and our rifles clean or get our clothes cleaned up or something like that during the morning hours. Then usually by noon, we'd have liberty call. Then we'd go on liberty that evening. I don't know what time that I went into town, but I know that we made a lot of places in Honolulu, even around the parks, in around the parks.

We'd always . . . there was always one man, and his name was . . . I don't know how to spell it, but he lives in California and his name is Bowoski. We always called him "Bow-wow woski." His favorite

pastime was to walk under the arm of King Kamehameha because he always heard that if a virgin walked under his arm that it would fall off. I have some pictures of him standing underneath there, and he's looking up waiting for the arm to fall (chuckle).

Stuff such as that. We'd lay around out in the park on the grass. We'd take pictures, and then we'd go make a bar and watch the pretty girls go by or something like that.

Marcello: Generally speaking, on a Saturday night what would be the condition of the men who drifted back onto the Marine Barracks. In other words, would most of them be intoxicated, or would they still be in fairly good shape?

Painter: I don't think so. I think most of them, even with a good many drinks . . . naturally, we had some drunks or . . . I say drunks. There were some men that were drunk when they came in. There was probably a few men left in town in the hotels and all.

I usually stayed . . . when I took a seventy-two, I'd stay at the Golden West simply because no one was allowed to go in any room. You couldn't even

take a visitor with you. In fact, I've taken . . . I'd have a bottle in my room. I'd go to the desk clerk, and I'd get my key. I'd say, "We're going up. I've got a bottle. We're going to get our bottle." He says, "Your friend will have to stay." No one was allowed, you see, except the person that had this room. This was good. I enjoyed that. Quiet. There wasn't a lot of activity running up and down the hall like you might find in some of the hotels. It was a nice hotel.

Marcello: Now on that Saturday night of December 6, did you drift back to the base after you had done what you wanted to do in Honolulu?

Painter: Yes, yes. We spent the complete day. Things had begun to close, and we were, I guess, some of the last ones that went back to the base that night. I believe there was four or five or six of us. If there was any more with us, I don't remember, but we were making the bars while going back down to catch the bus. I'd say, "Here's a bar. Let's go." "Oh, come on, Painter. Come on. Let's go. Let's go. No more drinks. No more drinks."

We went down farther, and there was a Chinese or a Japanese place, a restaurant. I said, "Let's go in and have something to eat before we go." They were closing early. Just as we got to the door, they said, "We're closed." We looked at the sign and said, "You're supposed to stay open until a certain time." They said, "Yes, but we're closing early tonight." But they let us in anyhow. What I ordered . . . I liked egg fu yung, and the other fellows had ordered different plates. They brought us all out chop suey, so you can imagine what a few Marines with a few drinks, getting something that they didn't order, what they were saying, so the management told us . . . he said that . . . I think he said that there would be no charge. Of course, it may have been by persuasion of voices (chuckle) of displeasure, but we left there and went back to the base.

The surprising thing about it, we went into town to get tight, to get drunk. We drank and we drank and we drank, and we didn't get drunk. We weren't even tight. Of course, we could take a lot. We could drink a lot.

Marcello: About what time did you get back to that base that Saturday night?

Painter: I don't know. I would say it must have been around 12:00 or 12:30.

Marcello: I would assume that on . . .

Painter: I started to say I think they were changing the guards at the time that we came in. This was at what I would call the east gate. I don't know whether it was the east or what, but I would say that it would be the east gate. But I think they were changing the guard at this time. Of course, this is something you always do even if you're tight, and the guards know it. Heck, they're stone sober. But if you're tight, you try to stiffen up and walk a straight line to show them that you're not tight because they will question you, which is their duty to do. We went on and went onto our tents and went to bed.

Marcello: And I would assume that people would be drifting in at all hours on a Saturday night.

Painter: Oh, sure.

Marcello: When you got back to the barracks, was there anything out of the ordinary that was happening, or was it more

or less simply a typical Saturday night?

Painter: Just a typical Saturday night.

Marcello: In other words, perhaps there were a few drunks who came in, but generally speaking, everybody was sober and in the sort of condition that would be necessary to fight efficiently, let's say.

Painter: There would have been no trouble there. You're speaking of men coming in drunk, and this is something that . . . a drunk man doesn't bother anyone when he comes in the barracks. There's too many sober men there that will put him under the shower or take care of him, and he knows this. If he's sick, yes, you might have two or three guys up. I've seen them up helping them, getting up out of bed stone sober, helping some old boy way across the . . . down at the other end of the barracks or something helping him out.

Marcello: But so far as you know, there was nothing of this sort that occurred on that Saturday night? Not that you remember anyhow.

Painter: Not from our company. Of course, as I said, there could have been some that came in tight. If there was, I didn't know it. In fact, I said I wasn't

tight, and I still maintain that I never got tight. I don't know why. I drank enough, and our intentions were to get tight, but we were not tight. I didn't have a hangover the next morning, and I was up early.

Marcello: Here again, Sunday was usually a day of rest, and I assume that if one didn't have the duty, he could stay in bed longer than usual, at least.

Painter: You could stay in bed all day long if you wanted to. It's your day. That's what we were doing. We were sleeping in, laying in, and waiting for the little Kanaka boy to bring the morning paper. We had nothing to do. It was a lazy day.

Marcello: Okay. So this more or less brings us up to that fateful day of Sunday, December 7, 1941, and once again I'm going to ask you to describe in as much detail as you can remember what your routine was on that Sunday, December 7, 1941.

Painter: As I previously said, this was a day of our rest or day of rest. It was our day unless you had some specific job that you had to do. At this time of the morning I was laying on my bunk reading the paper, and we heard a lot of noise. Usually, when

. . . as I said before, on Sunday morning Hickam Field nearly always had a mock air raid. This is what I thought it was--planes coming over from Hickam Field. You really didn't pay too much attention to it, but there was a lot of hollering, screaming, and then a tremendous amount of noise. I still had the paper in my hand, and I walked out in my skivvy drawers on the duck walk. Sergeant Wells came running out of the mess hall. I hadn't even gone to mess hall that morning. I don't remember what his first name was. I can still see him. He come running out of the mess hall and hollering, "Get your rifles and your ammunition belts and your gas masks and fall out!"

Marcello: What were your reactions when you heard this?

Painter: Oh, really . . . well, at this time I knew that it wasn't Hickam Field that was pulling a mock air raid. Something else was up because just before that, a Jap plane had come over the barracks, and I watched him fly down right over the top of the barracks. You could see the faded-out rising sun on it, which I would never have really paid much attention to it then until he started firing. Then

you could see the shingles popping up. I knew, hell, that wasn't Hickam Field.

Then I watched the plane. There was some huge gas tanks or oil tanks on the . . . I would say it'd be on the west end, way up, the far west end of the barracks. I saw this plane heading directly for it. I said, "That crazy fool is going to dive right into it." But he didn't hit the tanks. He hit the ground before he got to the tanks. That's the only thing, I guess, that kept them from exploding.

At the same time I saw the mast . . . I guess it was from the Arizona. I could see it from where we were at. I saw it go in the air.

Sergeant Wells . . . we all fell out and I knew . . . I run in and I got my ammunition belt, and I had it over my skivvy drawers. I said, "Well, to heck with that!" So I put my shirt and my trousers on and my shoes on. Then I fell out.

Marcello: In other words, up until this time, there was no evidence of panic or fear or anything of that nature on your part.

Painter: Not even after I saw the plane, the strafing. I mean it was just truly what they say it was. It was

a complete surprise. You're just not thinking about something like that.

Marcello: Now when did the planes start to strafe? Was this before you actually fell out?

Painter: Yes, yes. It was just before Sergeant Wells ran out of the mess hall, and that was probably within seconds after the planes strafed the barracks.

Marcello: How would you describe your reaction? Was it one mainly of curiosity?

Painter: I guess it had to be because I just couldn't figure out what actually was happening.

Marcello: In other words, when this plane started to strafe, you didn't dive for cover or anything of this nature? You stood there and watched it?

Painter: I stood there and watched him.

Marcello: Was it strafing your barracks?

Painter: No, we were in tents on the parade ground there, and I was standing out facing the barracks and watching the plane come right over the top of the barracks. I don't think that the plane must have been . . . he could have been twenty-five or thirty feet off the top of the barracks as far as I know. I think we did hear that some of the men in there . . .

Marcello: About how much . . .

Painter: . . . of course, a lot of them were in the mess hall, and that was down on the first floor. It probably saved a lot of men. I don't know how many was wounded in this strafing of the barracks.

Marcello: About how much time had elapsed between the time that you first heard the noise and the time that you fell out or fell in, I should say?

Painter: I don't know. You can say immediately. If you hear a big crash, naturally you're going to jump up and go see what's happening. This is what happened. Then Hickam Field was getting bombarded over there. Lord, the smoke and the fire! You knew that some of the hangars . . . you could see some of the hangars and see them ablaze. You could see some of them that were . . . when the smoke would clear any, you could see that they were demolished in wreckage. You knew something had happened, but it still hadn't dawned that we were in a war. I never thought about a war.

Marcello: But again, how much time elapsed between the time that you first heard the noise and the time that you fell in after receiving the sergeant's orders? Would it be less than a half-hour?

Painter: Oh, yes! I imagine within ten minutes probably.

Marcello: Were you relatively calm when you were putting on your shirt and your trousers and your shoes and all this sort of thing?

Painter: Probably not because I do know that I started out once with my rifle and my helmet, and I had my ammunition belt strapped even though there was no ammunition in it, but I still had it. I still had my skivvy drawers on and no shoes on (chuckle). So I said, "I'm not falling . . . I'm not about to fall out that way." So I put my clothes on. You could say fifteen minutes passed before everyone was out.

Marcello: So what happened from that point?

Painter: Our officers were there, and they were trying to get some word. They didn't know what had happened. They were trying to get some information on what to do, and we were all lined up out there as a company. They decided later that we would break up, so if something did happen, all of us wouldn't get it at one time. We scattered all over the place in platoons, you might say, and different squads.

Marcello: You still didn't have any ammunition yet?

Painter: We had no ammunition. Soon after that . . . and

I don't know. It could've probably been an hour, or it could've been less, but I loaded on . . . and this was all volunteer. A truck came up to load on to go to the ammunition dump. I got on the truck. We were in the back. There was a driver and an assistant up front, and there was four or five of us in the back. We headed out to the ammunition dump.

We came right down beside the harbor. I could see a ship turned upside down. One of them was sunk, and you could see part of it sticking up. The planes were still dropping their bombs.

Just about the time we got in . . . I would say about the middle of the harbor. Now I don't know actually if it was the middle of the harbor or not, but I know I looked over at Ford Island. They had their ramp for their PBY's--we called them the "ducks"--I believe that there was a "duck" or a PBY sitting almost to the hangar. This torpedo plane came over, directly over our heads, and he strafed but he was shooting well above us or over us. He come down and he skimmed, and then he dropped his torpedo in the harbor. We watched that going across the water, and it went right on up the ramp, and several feet up the ramp and it stopped.

Of course, we went on to what I call the north gate and went to the ammunition dump. Now when we turned out on the highway, I thought that it was probably the same plane that dropped this torpedo. It could have been another plane that done this, but he came right down the highway directly over our heads. He was swinging back and forth across the highway, really trying to knock us out.

Marcello: Was he strafing you at this time?

Painter: Strafing us, yes.

Marcello: What did it feel like to come under that strafing attack? This is probably the first time that you had been directly under the strafing.

Painter: Yes, yes. We all laid down in the truck and tried to get as close to the cab as we could. There was only one bullet that hit the truck. It hit the tailgate of it.

From that point on, yes, we did have fear. We were out there on the highway alone, but our driver was weaving. He was weaving. He was trying to weave the opposite way the plane was going. We would go from one bar ditch to the other. We were afraid the sonuvagun was going . . . and he told us, "Listen," he said, "If this plane turns around and comes back, the minute that he starts his strafing," he says, "I'm

going to stop, so you all lay down and stay down." He says, "I'm going to slam these brakes on and stop and hope he'll go right on over us." But he never came . . . the plane never came back.

We did go out to the . . . we got out to the ammunition dump. There was boxcars out there, and we didn't know where to go and find what ammunition that we would want. We didn't know where it was located. Believe it or not--there must have been six or seven, or it could have been eight of us--we could have taken that ammunition dump, and we didn't have a shell. We didn't have one bullet, and we could have taken that ammunition dump because there was no one there. If they were, they were dug in or something. I don't know. There was no one at this ammunition dump.

So we saw the . . . we were afraid to go in the bunkers. We didn't know. They could have been booby-trapped or fixed. So we saw the boxcars. We said, "We'll see what's in the boxcars."

Marcello: This ammunition depot had a railroad siding right there?

Painter: Yes. Evidently they had just gotten in some ammunition

because there were boxcars there. I remember one of . . . I can't think of his name. But he said, "No, sirree." He wasn't going . . . he wasn't about to break a lock on a boxcar. He'd never get out of the Marine Corps. Of course, there was a few words said and then "To hell with that! We'll bust that rascal open or tear it apart if we have to." That's . . . we did break the lock, beat the lock off.

We wound up with some thirty-caliber ammunition and hand grenades, mostly hand grenades. We loaded that on. We knew that no one there had any ammunition--no one except the guards--or as far as we knew, no one had it.

So we beat it on back. We really hated to hit the highway. We knew that that place was really going to be a beehive! But we came on through without any incident, and there was no more bombing, no more strafing. Everything seemed to be becoming quiet. The noise had really died down.

But going to the ammunition dump, when we passed the harbor, something else came into my mind. The harbor was full of oil. It was black. I remember seeing the men swimming out in there. Some of them

were pulling themselves up, and there were others around the dock that was helping them out of the water. You couldn't tell whether it was just oil or if they were burned to a crisp. I'm sure a lot of them were burn to a crisp. I've often wondered about that. I mean that's something that you can still see.

Marcello: What were your thoughts when you saw the ships that had been sunk or had been turned over, when you saw the black oil on the water and these individuals swimming in this water? What sort of thoughts went through your mind?

Painter: I guess the same thing that comes into my mind now when I see an accident, actually see an accident. I just say, "Damn!" I don't know of anything else to say. It's just something that . . . you see it. You know it's happening, so what can you say? I mean I can't. I'm surprised. I'm lost for any word at all. I just don't know what to say. I see it and I know it's horrible. You say a lot of things to yourself. I know I've said them at Tarawa--a lot of things I wished that I hadn't have said. There are a lot of things I wished I had have done, but at the moment you don't do it. I

don't know why. There was actually no fear other than the one time that I did fear of the plane coming back and strafing us.

Marcello: What was the base like when you got back to it with this load of ammunition? What was going on at the base?

Painter: Things were really stirring around then. Our officers had gotten people organized. They were organizing their men.

Marcello: But there was no ammunition at all on that base?

Painter: There was no ammunition. Someone else had brought in some ammunition, and they had passed out a clip to some of the men. Not all the men had ammunition. Well, they were real happy that we had brought in a good load of hand grenades. Then they decided they'll pass out the hand grenades. They thought, "Well, this could be probably a dangerous thing to do at this time until we can find out more." I don't know, but this was my thinking--that they were thinking this. So then they took up the hand grenades.

Marcello: Why were they so glad to have the hand grenades in the beginning? Were they expecting some sort of an invasion?

Painter: Yes, they figured that the Japanese were going to make a landing. We'd gotten the word that from some plantation in the cane field that the Army was fighting a task force that had landed and that we were waiting for word in order to go and to help.

Those that had ammunition were real happy. They felt that we . . . well, it makes you . . . it does make you feel a little more secure. You have something.

But we were up all night long waiting for the different reports coming in to find out where we would go or what we would do, and we actually stayed right there on the parade ground all night long. We did go to our tents and go to different parts of the base as guards. We also heard that Honolulu or the township had been taken, that they had made an invasion in there. We were just waiting.

Marcello: I'm sure that . . . well, as you mentioned, there were all sorts of rumors floating around.

Painter: Yes. Here's something else. Just before night, there was a lieutenant by the name of Weatherwax. He was a real fine man. I can't remember what his first name is. I would like to say what I think it

is, but I'm afraid that I might be wrong, and it could distort something there. But he always took a liking to me. Before we left San Diego, I was temporarily put in his company as a camoufleur. They were teaching us to be camoufleurs, camouflaging. I spent most of my time in Lieutenant Weatherwax's office. He said it was cooler, and he had better reading material. I don't know. He just took a liking to me, and I don't know why. He did me special favors. He gave me special passes, liberty, and I still don't know why. But right after the attack he came to me and told me, "I'm trying to get a call through to my wife." He says, "Let me have your mother's name and telephone number, and if I can get through, she will call your mother." A person like that, I should have gotten his full name. I should have kept in contact with him, but I guess being young and . . . I tell you again, I fall back to education. Education is one of the most wonderful things in the world. It keeps a person thinking and thinking properly. They can do better. That was my only regret--that I didn't complete an education. Everything that I have gotten, I've had to fight and

struggle for, and life can be easier.

Marcello: What sort of physical damage was done to the Marine base itself? You mentioned the strafing of the barracks. Did it sustain any bomb damage or anything of this nature?

Painter: I don't . . . I really don't believe it did. I can't answer that question, but the parts of the barracks that I saw, I don't think that there was any. There was no bombs dropped on it that I know of.

Marcello: I'm sure that there were a lot of trigger-happy Marines around that night.

Painter: Yes. Awhile ago I was saying that we broke up and went into squads. I was trying to think of the squad leader's name. I can still see him. He made the remark, "If any man runs, I'll shoot him in the back." I told him, "You better be mighty quick because if I have to duck or take cover or if I have to run to protect myself or to get cover, I'm not running through fear." I said, "You better be mighty fast." I can't . . . he was a pretty good guy, but he was talking through excitement. We got along--I knew that--and he knew probably what I said was probably through a fright.

Marcello: What did you do that night? What sort of guard duty or what have you did you pull?

Painter: Really nothing that was specific as far as our company went. We were out. We were milling. We were walking around. We were trying to . . . and possibly we were talking in whispers. Who knows? We were trying to get as much information as we could. A lot of scuttlebutt was coming in. Then it would come back that it was false, but we figured that we'd have to go to the cane fields. This is something that we wouldn't want to do.

Marcello: Why was that?

Painter: Simply because those cane fields are very thick and dense. The man out there that's waiting for you, he has the advantage, and if you're trying to stalk him, you've had it. We didn't think too much of that. Now we did think of burning them--the cane fields. I think some of the cane fields were burned. In fact, a lot of them were burned because they didn't know what was in there. They had to . . . the only way that they could do it would probably be to destroy that and back them to the ocean's edge.

Marcello: Did you hear very many shots ringing out during the night?

Painter: Oh, yes. In fact, all during the war, anyplace you go, you're going to find some trigger-happy guy that hears something, and they don't yell halt or whatever it is, and if it doesn't halt, he's going to fire. It's probably some of these recruits coming in, but I'm not saying this because . . . saying that they would be trigger-happy. They just hadn't had the training, and they do not know, and this is what they're told to do, and they do it. They don't take . . . well, sometimes you can't wait for the second sound. You've got to do it and then ask questions. I don't think anyone was killed or wounded during that time. They could have been. I don't know about the Army. I don't think there was any trigger-happy Marines.

Marcello: What did you do the next day? This would be on Monday, December 8.

Painter: I believe that we got ready to go to Red Bluff or what we called Red Bluff. This was the base we were constructing. We built the barracks. They were . . . they was all crude. Nothing elaborate.

There was a shelter. We built the mess halls.

We built the streets. We built everything from the ground on up and even built the roads.

Marcello: In other words, basically speaking, after the Japanese attack, you went back and resumed the task that you had started, that is, constructing that base.

Painter: Right. Yes.

Marcello: As you look back on the attack, how do you think the Japanese were able to pull it off? I'm sure you must have pondered that question many times.

Painter: Yes. I think that the American people have a tendency to . . . I've been told many, many times that I've been wrong in this, in my thinking of this, but I think we have a tendency to believe a person or countries too much. We have too much faith that they are our friends or that they're not going to be our next enemies. We give them too much of our thought of being a true friend. I think a person has to be proven to be a friend before he is a friend. I have to prove myself to be a friend to someone else. I don't consider myself a friend unless I prove myself to be a friend. I know that

I came up during the depression, and during the depression you had very few friends because the job that you had was a dollar a day, and you worked, and you worked hard not only eight hours but ten hours a day to make one dollar. There's also other people out there hoping that you would fall out with heat prostration or die--they didn't care--so that they could take your job of making a dollar a day. They had families, too. Of course, I was a young button, and I didn't have a family. This type of thing here. I think that even our government believed . . . they'd take a person at their word. Well, the word has to be proven to me first.

Marcello: Did you look for any individuals as a scapegoat or anything of this nature at that time? Now again, I want you to project yourself back to that period.

Painter: No. I said no. Yes, we did. We called the admirals and all the other generals and things stupid and what have you, but that is the only thing that . . . there was no reason for them not to know. Then we got the scuttlebutt that there was information that was sent in. Then we believed the scuttlebutt that was coming in naturally. We'd rather believe it

than believe what the general had to say. What enlisted man wouldn't? He was top brass. He should've known, and if he did get some scuttlebutt like that, he should've been investigating it thoroughly.

Marcello: When you say "he" are you referring to Admiral Kimmel?

Painter: Yes. He should've gotten together with his chiefs of staff and found out just exactly what was going on. It wouldn't have taken him long to have gotten to Washington anyhow. But the attack would already have been over, I guess, by the time he could have gotten into Washington.

But we should've had . . . our intelligence is not that stupid. Somehow they laid down on the job this time, but we have good intelligence in our nation. I don't know. You can't blame these people. They're humans, and we're going to make . . . I don't know that . . . I don't blame anyone. I imagine there are very few people that do blame them.