

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
NUMBER
219

Interview with
Fred R. Runce
July 6, 1974

Place of Interview: El Paso, Texas
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
Terms of Use: OPEN
Approved: Fred R. Runce
Date: 6 Jul 74

COPYRIGHT © 1974 THE BOARD OF REGENTS OF NORTH TEXAS STATE
UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF DENTON

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Oral History Collection, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, 76203.

Oral History Collection

Fred Runce

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: El Paso, Texas

Date: July 6, 1974

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Fred Runce for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on July 6, 1974, in El Paso, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Runce in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was at Wheeler Field during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Now Mr. Runce, 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. Runce: I was born in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, on August 30, 1914. My folks migrated to the States before I was a year old. They first lived in Los Angeles and then moved to Seattle. I attended grammar school and high school in

Seattle. Prior to joining the service, during the depression years, I worked for the WPA in the frozen foods industry . . . not the industry, but in the development of frozen foods in the government-sponsored program, which was called the Frozen Food Laboratory, in the Department of Agriculture. Then I went into the frozen foods packing business working for various companies. In the interim time I did some commercial fishing in United States-Canadian waters, Alaska, and I worked in the woods as a logger and a cook.

Marcello: It sounds like you had a very varied career before you entered the service.

Runce: In some ways, yes. In other words, I'd seen parts of Alaska--Anchorage, Fairbanks, some of the other costal towns. Mostly they were towns along the West Coast, and I got acquainted with quite a few of the Canadian Indians that we met fishing.

Then in the winter of 1940 they were talking of closing the lab, and for some reason or other I decided that I was . . . at that particular time I was TDY with the Food and Drug people. I was working downtown in the government building. The war began to heat up in Europe, and then came the draft.

To be perfectly blunt, I thought by getting out in the Pacific I could miss the initial part of the war in Europe. Anyway, this was my line of reasoning, so I . . . and since the recruiting officer in the building I was working in . . . I decided I might as well see if they'd take me. The first agency I went to was the Marines, and they wanted no part of me. Then I went to the Navy, and they said, "No."

So I waited two or three days, and while I was waiting for the lab to open one day, I decided I'd go up and see what the Army had to say. I've always had a mental impression in my mind that when I stuck my head in the door and the sergeant behind the desk asked me what I wanted and I said I was thinking of enlisting, that he had a headlock on me, threw me into the building-- now this is strictly imagining--took me into the room and said, "You want to enlist? Where do you want to go?" Well, that kind of caught me off-guard. I'd meant to go to the Philippines, but primarily it was all I could think of . . . in my mind at that time. It was \$2 for the one American dollar in the Philippines, but I said Hawaii and within four hours I was on a train to San Francisco. And that's when I enlisted.

Marcello: Let's just back up here a minute. You mentioned that you had it in your mind to go to the Philippines mainly because of the low cost of living, I assume. Then how did you end up in Hawaii?

Runce: I kind of had a mental block in my mind that when he asked me where I wanted to go, I said Hawaii when I meant to say the Philippines. The reason I wanted to go to the Philippines was because of the cost of living. I understood at the time there was two pesos or two Philippine dollars for one American. In other words, your military base pay would seem to go farther in the Philippines than it would in Hawaii. But when they actually asked me where I wanted to go I said Hawaii. Within four hours, as I said before, I was on a train for San Francisco.

Marcello: Where did you take your basic training?

Runce: Wheeler Field.

Marcello: This was the usual procedure in those days, was it not? In many cases you would go to your ultimate destination to take your basic training.

Runce: Right. As I recall it . . . of course, I never served in any stateside installation, though when I was working

for the government I stopped off at various installations--
Fort Lewis, Camp Murray, old Fort Vancouver on the
Columbia River.

Marcello: You mentioned Fort Ord?

Runce: No, I've been through Fort Ord, but I wasn't at Ord at
this particular time.

Marcello: What was the one you mentioned?

Runce: Fort Lewis and old Fort Vancouver.

Marcello: I see.

Runce: The fort that I went to on enlistment was . . . it's out
on the island next to Alcatraz.

Marcello: Angel Island?

Runce: Angel Island. That was the name of the island, but the
fort on it . . . I've forgotten the name of it, but it
was on Angel Island. It was an old Coast Artillery
establishment. It used to be an immigration station
for the Orientals, which in one way kind of prepared us
for the Asiatic countries as the commodes in the older
areas . . . not in the cantonment areas--the areas where
the troops are stationed--but in some of the older buildings
the commodes were flush to the floor, the same as we saw
when we got out in the Pacific. Even in Hawaii a lot of

the older places, especially with the Oriental peoples, their baths and lavatories were in essence a lot different than ours. So we did get exposed to them prior to getting out in the Pacific.

Marcello: When did you arrive at Wheeler Field?

Runce: McDowell! Fort McDowell! That was the name of the holding center on Angel Island. I was there approximately thirty-five days, if I recall right. We left by ship in March, April . . . I believe I arrived in Hawaii on the 12th or 15th of April, but I'm not positive.

Marcello: This would be of 1941.

Runce: '41.

Marcello: Well, I gather that by the time that you arrived in the Hawaiian Islands the rapid build-up was already taking place, was it not?

Runce: There was a build-up, but I can't say that it was actually that rapid, or at least I didn't see it in the area that I was in.

Marcello: How would you describe the tenor of the basic training that you received at Wheeler Field? Was there a sense of urgency connected with it, or was it a rather routine basic training?

Runce: No. It was routine, very . . . not lax, but very seldom was there any pressure put on us. About the only day pressure would be put on us would be like a Thursday and Friday afternoon to put us on restrictions for Saturday and Sunday. Of course, while we were in basic training, theoretically, it was supposed to have lasted for ninety days. And in this particular area, we not only had Air Corps people, but we also had the service troops. In other words, in that particular time and space, the Air Corps, as a service, was the top of the pecking ladder, you might say, and then within the area of ordnance which--when I enlisted in it it was the Ordnance Corps--was the top of the service with the medical people being on the bottom of the ladder. They'd be Ordnance, Signal, and I think it was Quartermaster . . . no, Engineers and then Quartermaster. And usually the last people--the dumbest, you might say--were assigned to medics.

Marcello: In other words, even though you were assigned to Wheeler Field, you still remained in the Army. You were not in the Air Corps.

Runce: No, I was Army Ordnance attached to the Air Corps. Our type of training at recruit camp consisted of learning

how to make the bunk, keep a footlocker up. In other words, in the barracks life at that particular time, all you were allowed to have showing was, like I say, two pairs of shoes, service shoes. Your civilian shoes, if you had them, no. You had to keep them out of sight. You had your wall locker at the head of your bed or against the wall, and your laundry bag would be at the foot of your bed. The beds were alternated--the head of one person to the wall, the next one on the isle. I forget the distance between people, but for health reasons they were supposed to be so many feet between people to counter communicable disease and so forth.

The barracks area was in a very Spartan condition. Your civilian clothes were held to a minimum--if you had civilian clothes. Of course, at that particular time they didn't actually want you to go out in "civvies," as they were called. They usually wanted you to go out in uniform.

So in our recruitment--that first several weeks--we were just really learning how to make a bed, polish shoes, get periodic haircuts. If I recall right, we

had to get up at 4:30 in the morning. We had fifteen minutes to use the bathroom, clean. Then we fell out for roll call. Then we could go back in and clean up the bivovac area and be ready to march to breakfast by 5:30, if I recall right. We went to breakfast, came back, had another roll call, and then we'd go into the specific types of training that we went through.

Marcello: In other words, what you're saying in effect is that your training you received here at Wheeler Field was rather routine and typical Army training.

Runce: Right.

Marcello: Now after you got out of boot camp, what particular area did you go into?

Runce: I was pulled from boot camp by the ordnance troops. I think there was four of us. We were pulled from boot camp at approximately thirty days as the three ordnance companies that we were going to be assigned to decided they needed us within an inter-company structure before we could finish our routine boot camp.

Marcello: What sort of duties did you have in this ordnance company?

Runce: I was trained as a weapons mechanic. In the process of learning how to repair . . . well, I learned how to repair weapons up to 75 millimeter cannons. Primarily we weren't interested in cannon. I think the only cannon we had on the base was the morning-evening guns by the flagpole. And to the best of my knowledge, in that particular time and space, we never had any trouble with the cannon, so the heavy guns--if you want to call them heavy guns--we had a minimum of experience, but that wasn't our prime mission. Our prime mission was to service the machine guns--both .50 and .30 caliber--for the airplanes. And as soon as we were sufficiently qualified in weapons repair, the nucleus of the ordnance platoons were assigned to two different fighter groups there at Wheeler as weapon support people and ammunition support people to the squadrons.

Marcello: Now at Wheeler Field there were primarily the pursuit planes, isn't that correct?

Runce: Right. Pursuit planes.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to Pearl Harbor did the pace of your training and your routine pick up quite a bit, or was it business as usual right up to December 7?

Runce: It was business as usual up to sometime of October as far as the service troops at Wheeler were concerned. Then they began to go on periodic standby alerts along with the various maneuvers that were going on on the base.

Marcello: What form would these alerts usually take?

Runce: They did away with the Wednesday afternoons and Saturday days off. Sunday was still a day off to begin with. The standard custom would be that Wednesday afternoon would be quiet hours. After lunch, if you stayed in the cantonment area, you had to be in your bunk laying down asleep or reading, where you wouldn't bother anybody. And usually on Saturday after parade, you were turned loose to do whatever you wished.

But beginning with the first alerts--as I recall, it started in October--they did away with the quiet hours on Wednesday. We'd work Wednesday afternoon. If we stood a parade on Saturday, we immediately changed into fatigues and went into our various areas supposedly to work. Most of the time we were just standing around griping because we were there.

Marcello: But normally speaking, the ordnance people remained on the base on Saturday beginning about October.

Runce: Yes, that was sometime in October.

Marcello: And this would continue right up on until Pearl Harbor?

Runce: No, it was intermittent.

Marcello: I see.

Runce: Then in November we began to work around the clock--twenty-four hours a day--the later part of November. I remember . . . I'm pretty sure we worked Thanksgiving, though the night crew that worked the night was off. But then we went TDY to the ammunition areas at Schofield Barracks, where we turned bombs, inspected ammunition, belted ammunition, and this was done in shift work. Each shift worked twelve hours--on twelve hours, off twelve hours. This was sort of intermittent until December.

In December we were on full alert up to Friday, which would be the 5th. Schofield Barracks, as I recall it, was on alert till Wednesday. Normally, we'd have gone off of alert with them, but because of the build-up of the ammunitions that were turned back into the storage areas, a few of the ordnance companies from Wheeler Field were required to de-belt, repack, stack, re-identify ammunition. Consequently, we worked on Wednesday, Thursday, and through Friday.

On Friday afternoon, even though there was still ammunition to be piled . . . you know, it was still piled up. The bulk of it had already been put back into the storage area, and they decided, "Well, we might as well have the weekend off." So we were on alert for a period of twelve, fourteen, fifteen days just prior to the attack. But a couple of days just prior to the attack . . . actually, we were off alert . . .

Marcello: And you were back to your normal procedure?

Runce: Right. We were allowed passes. If we wanted to go to town there was no restriction. We could take off for town. We didn't have to report--let our first sergeant know where we were at. I mean, the restrictions we had prior to Saturday were eliminated.

Marcello: Now normally speaking, if there was an alert, what kind of liberty could you get here at Wheeler Field on a weekend?

Runce: We were restricted to the base. I mean, if we wanted to go to town, we had to go apply through out section head, the adjutant and the first sergeant, for a pass--a three-day pass or eight-hour pass or whatever it was.

Marcello: How hard was it to get one of these passes?

Runce: Very easy to get.

Marcello: Would it be safe to say, however, that the amount of time that you spent in town would be restricted due to the lack of money that you usually had?

Runce: Right.

Marcello: Normally, even on weekends, unless it was right after payday, you would probably entertain yourself on the base, is that correct?

Runce: Right.

Marcello: Do you recall when you got paid during that period, or how the paydays ran?

Runce: If I recall right, we were paid the last day of November, which is the normal military payday.

Marcello: Normally, it was the last day of the month when you'd get paid?

Runce: Right, but at that particular time we were restricted as to whether we could take off. The usual gambling that went on still existed, but the troops didn't have the accessibility, other than in their own cantonment areas, to gamble which at that particular time and space was, well, a pretty big industry, especially out in Hawaii.

Marcello: Now as relations got worse between the United States and Japan, did you keep abreast of world affairs or anything of this nature?

Runce: No. What I'm trying to say is that the troops themselves were very blasé. They talked about it a little bit. Of course, with the old American braggadocio they said, "Well, let them come. We'll take care of them."

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

Runce: Well, in my particular instance I'd already been associated with various Japanese. I was, at one time, very familiar with the Mukai family on Vashon Island in the State of Washington. Well, there was the Mukai family. They were the strawberry kings of the State of Washington.

Marcello: And what was the island that they lived on?

Runce: Vashon Island, I believe. It's either Vashon or Whidbey Island.

Marcello: What was the second island?

Runce: Whidbey Island and Vashon Island are two fairly large islands in the Puget Sound area. They happened to be . . . the father was a small-statured man, but his

sons were fairly large. And I used to go into the Japanese area of the town. I liked Oriental foods, especially the Americanized versions of them--chop suey, sukiyaki. At that particular time, when you went into a Chinese restaurant, if you bought the family dinners, you could usually get a seven course meal for the price--if you bought it à la carte--for the price of one item à la carte. Of course, the family dinners were predicated on like two, three, five, seven, or whatever the size of the party. So if you went in by yourself, they wouldn't serve you, but if you went in with one or two or more people, then you could buy one of these family-size dinners. The Chinese and Japanese that I knew were from the Oriental parts of town. They varied in size, structure, and you might say availability of conversation. The women in those areas were very hard to approach and had basically nothing to do with the white or Caucasian. The Filipino . . . well, on the West Coast, if there's any such thing as prejudice in the West, the average West Coast Caucasian was deeply prejudiced against the Filipino. I would presume it was the same as most

people think of whites in the deep South being prejudiced against the Negro and Indian. Most of the Chinese that I ever knew were tall, slender-type people. Once you got acquainted with them they were very communicative, but prior to being able to get acquainted with them, they were very hard people to get to or communicate with. Same way with the Japanese that I knew. But the few Japanese that I did know I met through the frozen food lab. They would come in asking for technical information, and from time to time, during that period of time I worked for the frozen foods laboratory, I would go out to their places and collect samples and process them to evaluate their types of crops for the frozen food industry.

Marcello: In general, then, what were your opinions of the Japanese?

Runce: Frankly, I have never basically trusted a Japanese. In high school--the ones that I knew--some of them were my good friends, and the same was true with the Filipinos. But the ones that I thought of as the lower classes seemed to be very deceptive in their nature. Out in Hawaii, the ones that I thought were . . . I did get acquainted with certain shopowners in the various areas in Honolulu, and they seemed to be friendly enough, but in their conversations with me they seemed to be asking for various

information about troops and places and this and that, which I in turn did report through my orderly room that I thought there was something that should be looked into. Whether these people were actually spies, if you want to use that word, I never did know.

Marcello: What sort of questions would they ask you?

Runce: Oh, how we liked the barracks area. Were the tent cities still there at Wheeler Field? When I was first stationed and turned to duty, our barracks area was a tent city between the two groups. Due to the lack of permanent or semi-permanent barracks, a portion of the Air Corps--two or three squadrons--lived in tents and the ordnance and signal companies were in tents while they were building our barracks area. This tent city, depending on where you lived or what part of it you lived . . . I happened to be lucky. The tent that I lived in was right off the street, so when we had a breeze, we got a breeze through the tent. But those deeper in were shielded from the breeze. I imagine it could get pretty hot and muggy down there.

Marcello: What other sort of questions did they ask you?

Runce: Like, did we get new vehicles in. In other words, kind of insidious little questions that at the time may not

sound very important, but . . . like if they asked me about trucks and a little later they asked my buddy what kind of weapons or how many guns we got up at Schofield Barracks or did we see artillery doing this or doing that, they'd probably add it up to something important. The questions individually asked me . . . if I hadn't been approached to really beyond my lookout for this, I would have probably not thought anything of it. Then again, maybe my suspicions were . . . because of the fact that I had been asked to keep my ears open and my eyes open, you might say, for this kind of stuff, maybe I was a little over-zealous. I don't know.

Marcello: I gather that you had some suspicions of some of the people of Japanese ancestry on the Hawaiian Islands, and this obviously had caused some concern among the military on the islands. I recall at one particular point, as relations got worse between the United States and Japan, the airplanes at Wheeler were lined up in nice, neat rows, were they not?

Runce: Right.

Marcello: And why was this done?

Runce: Supposedly to be able to keep better surveillance over them with a minimum amount of people, which, on the surface sounded pretty good. At that particular time Wheeler Field was not a concrete airdrome. It was a tarmac. In other words, the only solid ground would be in front of the hangars. So when the planes would take off from the ground, in other words, the tarmac.

Marcello: Why was it called tarmac?

Runce: I think it's a holdover from World War I. They would say the actual take-off and landing field was a tarmac. Anyway, it's supposed to be . . . the planes are that light that they can fly on and off the ground if it didn't get too wet, you know, too muddy and begin to have potholes. They were all concentrated on the aprons, and theoretically, instead of having to have a hundred guards out, they could get by with ten or twelve. So when they were lined up, they were lined up nicely so that anybody coming in could . . . where they would have ordinarily gotten one plane, they could get the whole squadron, which they did.

Marcello: In other words, this was perhaps the best way to arrange those planes in order to guard against sabotage, but at the same time they did make an ideal target for attacking airplanes.

Runce: Right. Well, actually when the attack came, the planes tended to get in each other's way and what pilots that were able to get down the line--they were trying to get down on the runway--they tended to get in each other's way so some planes that may have been able to get off were not able to get off before they were shot down.

Marcello: Did you have very many Japanese civilians working on the base?

Runce: That's a question that . . . Hawaii is an island with one of the largest conglomerate of races--Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Polynesians, Melanesians--all intermixed. I presume that there were some Japanese. Our impression was that actually they were native Hawaiians that . . . most of them were girls brought in to work in the PX. On base I don't actually recall a straight Japanese girl. Most of them were of mixed blood. Some of them had Japanese blood. Most of them, though, we thought were of Hawaiian blood or Hawaiian mixed blood.

Marcello: How safe did you feel here on the Hawaiian Islands?
Did you feel relatively secure here?

Runce: Right. In my opinion--of course, we didn't discuss it too much--people didn't think much of it. From the political standpoint most people, I presume, kind of had the same idea in mind as I did in that we would sit it out in the Pacific for awhile while the big war started up in Europe.

Marcello: And even if the war did start in the Pacific, you probably thought that the Hawaiian Islands would still be far away from it.

Runce: Right. So among the troops that I was associated with at Schofield Barracks, Wheeler, Fort Shafter, they weren't too concerned about what was happening in the Pacific. Most of the concern was what was happening in Europe and how we were possibly affected there. I don't recall being that concerned about the Japanese till December 7. Now maybe among the officers there would have been something totally different. They were probably briefed of the situation a lot better than we were because back in those days they didn't believe in telling the troops anything.

Marcello: Normally, when you had liberty, how often would you get into Honolulu?

Runce: I would average maybe three days a month. No, two . . . yes, three or four days a month, which was usually between the 1st and the 15th.

Marcello: Is that still when you had a little bit of money yet?

Runce: Right. From the 15th till the end of the month most of the troops stayed on base.

Marcello: Normally, on a weekend what percentage of the troops would still be on base? You'd have to estimate this, of course.

Runce: I would say between 50 and 60 per cent of the troops.

Marcello: Now you also mentioned awhile ago that . . . of course, there were certain entertainment facilities on the base itself. On a typical Saturday night, did many of the troops come back to the barracks drunk or anything of this nature?

Runce: Oh, yes. In the areas that I was in they set up the actual routine. Come payday, the average troop would pay off his debts and go to the PX, whether it was on Wheeler Field or Schofield or downtown, and get his requirements for the month, such as his soap, you know, razor blades, such as that. If he didn't go right to

town, they usually gyrated to a poker or gambling game of some sort. Usually they would gamble up to seven or eight o'clock, and then they'd take off for town and spend the rest of the evening in town and be back on base to get ready for what was going to happen in the morning.

Marcello: Generally speaking, would these troops who, let's say, did a great deal of celebrating on a Saturday night be ready to fight on a Sunday morning if the situation arose?

Runce: Most of them would be. They may have been, you might say, drunk the night before, but very few of them were, as you might say, falling down drunk. They'd get loud and some of them would get aggressive, but somebody usually in any crowd could talk the aggressiveness out of them and get them to bed. Basically, there was very few that got that aggressive that they had to be beat over the head and put to bed.

Marcello: Well, one of the points that I want to make here is that, yes, that there obviously would be a normal amount of . . . certain amount of drinking on a Saturday night,

but it wasn't simply one big drunken brawl or anything of that nature on a Saturday night, and most of the troops would be able to fight on a Sunday.

Runce: Right. The social centers back in that day were squadron day rooms. The squadron day room would have one or two . . . depending on the wealth, you might say, of the squadron, most of them had two pool tables. They had five or six . . . not exactly card tables, but tables that could be set up for gambling--either poker or blackjack--and one of the pool tables could be converted into a crap table. The only time the day room was used as a gambling center, you might say, was payday night and the next day, unless it happened not to fall on the weekend. If payday was Friday, then Friday, Saturday, and Sunday would be open for gambling in the day room. A trooper had been designated as day room orderly. This was a lucrative job for him because . . . and this is why a lot of people wanted the day room orderly job. Every game that was put on in the day room, whether it was playing pool or whatever, the orderly got a rake-off. Of course, out of their rake-off they had to give the squadron fund so much money. But the average day room operator--trooper in charge of day room--would average

three to five hundred dollars a month off of the troops that utilized that day room. I mean, back in those days when \$30 was the base pay, \$300 was pretty lucrative money. So the day room would be one place where the troops would go, and the other place would be the local beer garden. At Wheeler Field the beer garden was part of the cafeteria portion of the PX system. And then you had your NCO club.

Marcello: What I want you to do at this point now is to describe as best you can your routine on Saturday, December 6, 1941, and I want you to go into as much detail as you can remember. Then from that point we'll carry over into the actual attack itself on December 7. But let's start with the Saturday, December 6.

Runce: Well, as I recall it, we stood a parade that morning . . .

Marcello: When you say you stood a parade, that's the same as an inspection, is that correct?

Runce: Right. Then we were let go. Those that wanted to go to town could go to town. And since I had quite a bit of money with me, I decided I'd go into Honolulu.

Marcello: Was this what was left over from your pay?

Runce: Well, we didn't have much of a chance to spend our pay, you know, the previous weekend because we were still on alert.

Marcello: I see.

Runce: So . . . but what I had owed me from various individuals that particular payday, I had quite a bit of money. So I had gone into Honolulu. There used to be a large restaurant-bar in town--Chinese run--and I've always liked Chinese pork, and usually one of the places I'd go when I went into town would be this place with Chinese pork. I do remember I went out to Waikiki. I didn't . . . well, things weren't hopping the way they should have been, so somehow or other, instead of staying downtown as I'd planned on doing, I'd returned to the base.

So I'd gone downtown to Honolulu. I'd probably been all through town. I'd probably spent six or seven dollars which was quite a bit for that particular time and space for what I was doing, and I returned to the base probably around eleven--before twelve o'clock.

Normally, I didn't eat breakfast on Sundays, but for some reason or another, with some of the horsing around in the barracks, I decided I'd get up and go to breakfast.

Marcello: What time did you turn in that night?

Runce: Before midnight. There was no poker game or a game that I wanted to get into, so I just decided, "Well, there's nothing else to do. I might as well go to bed." As I said, normally I didn't eat breakfast on Sunday.

Marcello: Now you could stay in bed as long as you wished on Sunday, could you not?

Runce: Right. So I got up and ran into a friend of mine and got him out of bed, and we decided we'd go down and eat breakfast. By this time we'd moved out of the tent city and moved in the wooden barracks just below Schofield Barracks. It used to be one of the old grenade-bayonet practicing areas for Schofield. So on one side of the barracks we ran into the cantonment area, and on the backside of the barracks we were out up against the open hills or open ground. This has something to do with a little later in the story.

Now we had about half a mile to three-quarters of a mile to walk from our barracks to the consolidated mess which was in the permanent building maybe three-quarters of a mile from where our camp area was at. The mess halls that were going to service our service

troop area had not been built yet, so that's why we had to go to the consolidated mess in the permanent building.

Well, we had our breakfast and we were on our way back to the barracks. The main road that runs through Wheeler Field is called Kamehameha Highway, which I think is four lanes--two lanes on each side with a big parking median of trees, not rhododendron, but trees that have a flower similar to rhododendron. Well, anyway, most of the median in the center part of the base had quite a few trees in it.

Well, anyway, we left the mess hall, and I would say we were about two blocks away, almost opposite where the PX that at that time existed. We saw these planes coming in over the mountains. So we thought, "Well, that's kind of funny." We thought maneuvers were over with. We knew our planes weren't out, or we thought they weren't. We finally decided maybe the Navy was pulling the same old stunt that had been going on off and on all along--that they were on maneuvers of their own.

Marcello: And I think periodically they would com in and make mock strafing runs of the Army facilities and this sort of thing, would they not?

Runce: Yes, and the Army did the same thing to them. This is why at that particular time and space we were wondering, "Why in the hell is the Navy on maneuvers. We just got off maneuvers. We worked our butt off straightening things up, and here they're back on. We'll probably be on maneuvers again, if not this afternoon, tomorrow." A little dialogue between some of the troops like that.

Then, all of a sudden they spread out over the runway--not the tarmac, but over the hard stand and the hangar areas. I don't know. As far as I'm especially concerned, even though I saw the red ball on the side of the airplane, it did not dawn on me at that particular time that that was a Japanese plane. I saw the bomb take off--still didn't quite register. I remember saying to some of the guys with me, "Boy, they're really going to flour-bomb the hangars today!" Probably no sooner said "flour-bomb" then the DOM hangar--that's the base shop's hangar, major repair hangar--it went all over the sky.

Marcello: You called it the DOM?

Runce: Right.

Marcello: What does DOM stand for?

Runce: Well, Director of Maintenance, I think is what they call it now, but that wasn't the name then, but it was a heavy maintenance hangar. When the local mechanic couldn't repair his plane or an engine needed an overhaul, they'd transfer it out of the squadron and into this area, and they had the more sophisticated equipment to do a major repair.

Marcello: And this was the hangar that you saw being hit.

Runce: And as we saw the steel and debris going up in the air, we said, "Flour bombs, hell! Them's Japs!" Well, everybody started running around like a bunch of ants.

Marcello: Would you say the original reaction was one of panic or perplexity or what?

Runce: Perplexity. In the group that I was with there was probably twenty or thirty people within a forty or fifty-yard area. Some of them stopped and stood there. Others started to run a few steps and then stopped and began to look around and said, "Well, what the heck are we going to do now? Where am I supposed to be?" The Air Corps people that happened to be up in this area that I knew--most of them took off to their hangars. The service troops . . . some of the signal people had their work area in the permanent building and returned to the permanent building.

Myself, all I could think of was getting a gun. So the only place I knew I could get a gun was in my barracks area. Even though I started off running . . . I probably ran five or six steps, and in the process of thinking and watching these other planes as they hit right on down the hangar line dropping bombs. And there was a bunch of shouting going on, "What are we going to do?" "Goddamn the Navy. Why do they have to pull stuff like this?" There are a lot of little side stories, you might say, stories that emerged from this, but as far as actual panic, I can't say that I actually saw it. Perplexity, yes. Some people that apparently could think a little faster than others . . . duty, you might say. During this particular time, too, I . . .

Marcello: In other words, after an initial state of perplexity, then, professionalism took over, and you knew you had a particular job to do and you did it.

Runce: So, like I said, a lot of the Air Corps people headed for their hangars . . . their various hangars that they worked out of. I being in ordnance . . . and at that particular time we had no particular squadron we were assigned to, so my particular duty spot in my mind was

back to the cantonment area and let the company commander tell us what we were going to do.

Now in the process of returning . . . where this plane come from I still don't know, but it came down from the Schofield side and it started strafing. All I can remember was the back of this building which was opposite the dispensary, which was on the other side of Kamehamea; had a sump hole. I remember diving into that. When I dived in it the first time, there was another fellow and myself. I never did remember who he was, but I'm positive in my mind that I did know him.

This first plane came over, and we could at least see the puff marks as he strafed over the dispensary area into the PX area. When we thought the sky was clear, we started running into the housing area. What I figured on doing was running through the housing area, which would give me some protection, and through the housing area into my barracks area, so I could . . . well, what I was trying to do was get back to my barracks area--company area.

I think I was about twenty-five or thirty feet away when another plane come on in. This time, when I

dove into the hole, I didn't dive in flat. I dove kind of catty-cornered, which left my butt and legs up above the original level of the ground, and five or six people were on top of me. Then I could hear the machine gun popping off, and I could hear it hitting. The only thing I think that saved me then was the ground that had been taken out of the hole. It formed a parapet in front of the hole. I know they hit the parapet, but all I can remember was here my butt was up in the air and they'd shoot me in the butt (chuckle).

Finally, that plane went by and we untangled, and we started wondering what we were going to do, and all the sudden somebody said, "Well, this ain't getting us noplacement. Let's get going."

So we took off again, and this particular time they came around the corner of the building. Apparently, a bomb had dropped right in front of me. Anyway, a 2 x 4 flying through the air hit me lengthwise across my body and knocked me down. Now whether I was knocked out or not, I really don't know. At that particular time and space, if I was hurt I didn't recognize it. When I got up I could still move. I wasn't conscious of any pain. So I proceeded on into my barracks area.

We happened to have one of the sergeants that put out the guns and ammunition without a hand receipt. I heard that some of the other squadrons wouldn't put out the guns and ammunition because the supply sergeants were so ingrained to cost that if they lost any property it came under their pay. Even though this was a war, they weren't giving out one gun unless somebody signed a piece of paper for it.

But our particular supply sergeant . . . oh, yes, by the time we got there he was boiling mad. It seemed like . . . his name was Sergeant Franks. He'd spent five or six months gathering plywood--this thin veneer from various packing cases--to panel his room. Now back in those days a lot of the various sergeants had a little bit of leeway as to where they could stay. The first sergeant usually had a room of his own of quite some space right off the orderly room. The supply sergeant had a room in the supply room, and that was a pretty good space--almost three or four times the amount of space that was authorized the person out in the barracks. So he could fix it up the way he wanted to, and he'd gathered this veneer, and he'd just nicely paneled and varnished

. . . in other words, he had a real nice-looking den built, and what he was mad about was that they blew off one corner of it.

So he was hopping mad about the dirty so-in-so's that ruined his home, you might say. And I think that's the main reason why he wasn't having us sign for our ammunition and guns. I know he also kept wondering, "Who in the hell can run a machine gun?" He wanted to give a couple of machine guns out. To the best of my knowledge at that particular time, none of us were trained--other than what we learned in our armament schools--how to man a machine gun. To the best of my knowledge, we didn't take any machine guns in our initial part and time.

The strafing apparently had moved out from this particular edge of the base into the center portion of the base. Our first sergeant said, "Well, let's move out into this old bayonet-grenade area, and we'll assemble there while we find out what we're going to do."

As we were moving up into the area, another plane came down over Schofield . . . what we called the pack train. No, no, wait a minute. This happened

about an hour later. But I know we were going in and out of this field for quite some time. The attack was already over with when this other plane came over.

Well, by this time most troops there at Wheeler Field had reported into their company areas. The various sergeants were beginning to get control of their people--make sure they were armed. We were told to get our packs together, you know, to get ready to move out in the field. Then periodically there'd be an alert, and other airplanes were coming in.

And this one particular time, I'd say about an hour . . . I think the attack occurred just before eight o'clock. This is why I've always been under the impression that they hit Wheeler Field first. I think they wanted to wipe the fighters out before they actually hit Pearl, though there's room for argument there. People at Pearl said they hit there first. It may be a matter of minutes, but they very effectively wiped out the major fighting component of fighters right there at Wheeler Field.

Marcello: In other words, they destroyed most of the fighters right on the ground.

Runce: Right, right. Now we did have two squadrons . . . parts of squadrons detached from Wheeler. Just what they were offhand, I don't recall. We had one at Bellows Field on gunnery and another at Ewa Beach or Soldiers Beach, and . . . yes. And some of the pilots from Wheeler managed to get transportation, get out to these different places . . . or to Soldiers Beach and they were . . .

Marcello: This would have been Welch and Taylor.

Runce: Right. And several planes were shot down at Barbers Point during the same time they were attacking . . . the PBY base was just opposite Bellows Field.

I've always had an impression, though I never did take the trouble to really check it out, that the machine gun that went into action at Wheeler Field was set up by prisoners in the stockade. This is hearsay, but I do remember I saw machine guns fire during the various times of the attack. I saw machine gun fire coming from the stockade area which was next to the DOM hangar, and I'm also under the impression that they shot a plane down. I said hearsay and impression. I am positive I saw fire. The hearsay is that it was prisoners that set up the gun, and this is why I said

that discipline back in those days was such that even when guys were in the guardhouse for various reasons or other their first thought was still duty. They were soldiers and had certain things to do whether they were a prisoner or whether they were actually on duty. Well, anyway, I think the state of discipline back in those days was a whale of a lot different than it is nowadays.

Marcello: What particular--now you mentioned this--what particular acts of courage or heroism did you see taking place during this period?

Runce: Well, I can't say that I saw any acts of heroism in that particular area. If you want to call it heroism, as I was heading for the cantonment area and zig-zagging between the buildings, I do remember a sergeant. He was a master sergeant. He apparently had left his quarters, and he was on the median on Kamehameha Highway when they were strafing down Kamehameha Road. I can remember in my mind saying, "Well, boy, he's had it." He'd stopped just as he'd got under the median, and then the next thing I remember is he was shaking his fist and picking up clods of dirt and throwing them and still shaking his fist. Now how come he didn't get killed

beats me. I do know that I saw dust kick up on both sides of him, and the next thing I saw was him shaking his fist and picking up clods of dirt and throwing up in the air as high as he could, and I presume he was wanting them to come back and fight.

Marcello: I assume that there was virtually no resistance put up at all during the initial wave, but by the time the second wave came around probably things had become a little bit better organized, had they not?

Runce: Right. Within fifteen minutes, I would say, the individual rifles had begun to fire. As I said, I saw fire coming up from the stockade area and that was a machine gun. The squadron barracks along the line--there was fire coming out of various windows in there. I don't recall machine gun fire out of some of the windows, though some of the fellows I talked to later said that, yes, they had some machine guns going from the bottom floor area.

So it wasn't a coordinated effort, but within thirty minutes the various elements were beginning to set up for an attack, which brings me to the story about that airplane I'm talking about. This is probably an hour or an hour and a half after the raid was over with.

All of a sudden we got an air raid warning, and down from Schofield Barracks comes this airplane. And as it kept coming into Wheeler, the guns from Schofield Barracks opened up on it. By this time we'd run out into this field and were laying in the grass, and the guys were saying, "Well, what are we going to do? Do we shoot at it?" Well, some people cautioned, "Well, don't shoot at it here. If he sees our fire, he'll strafe us and we're on level ground and he'll get us. This guy that I always called a Russian, he rolled over on his back and started shooting, and the next thing we knew, the plane nosed over and dove into the ground. The Russian stood up and said, "I got it! I got it! I got it! Boy, did you see me? I got it!" And at that particular time we found out it was one of our own Navy planes.

Marcello: What was he firing at it with?

Runce: The Russian was firing at it with a rifle, but it was hit apparently by the machine guns at Schofield Barracks.

Marcello: I see.

Runce: Anyway, it came down through a . . . it tried to get into Wheeler Field to land, apparently. It went through a gauntlet of fire at Schofield Barracks.

Marcello: Did any of those B-17's from the West Coast attempt to land at Wheeler Field when they were caught in the attack?

Runce: If they did, I didn't see them. I think they did try to come into Wheeler Field, but, as I said, at that particular time and space I was just under the auto park from Schofield Barracks where our cantonment area was at. We were waiting for orders for what we were going to do, and in the interim time this plane came in.

I do know the squadron commander--or company commander as they call them--had come into the area, had told the first sergeant to hold us together, had gone down into the . . . I believe it was the Officer's Club area which was set up as the command post. He got his instructions, and by that time most of the people that were in town or wherever they were had got back to base, and to the best of my knowledge by 10:00 or 10:30 all the ordnance companies were . . . their complement was there.

Marcello: In general, what did the base look like in the aftermath of the attack? What was the extent of the damage as you could describe it?

Runce: From the hangar lines into the barracks housing area it didn't look like too much. You know what I mean? You couldn't see too much damage. In other words, as you drove down Kamehameha Highway looking at the hangar lines from the street side, it didn't look like too much damage had been done, but as you got down on the apron . . . other than DOM hangar. The DOM hangar was completely demolished. As you got out on the apron side, the stacks of planes that were . . . you might say they were stacked up on top of each other, burning. And the fronts of the hangars were bombed. The damage was terrific. Now not every hangar was badly damaged. I can't remember what groups were . . . the hangars facing the DOM or the stockade area were more damaged than the hangars on the other side of the tent city, but one of those hangars--I think it was 6th Squadron hangar--was almost as badly tore up as the DOM hangar. But the airplanes were just so much junk.

Marcello: Was there a chance to bring any firefighting equipment into play at this time?

Runce: I believe they were brought into play, but I didn't see them. I think that some of them that did get into

play, they were pretty well shot up. I think the fire engines that did get out on the line were pretty well shot up, and they weren't able to do too much. The engines, probably from Schofield and farther on up the base, I think they did get to the line, but, there again, at that particular time and space I was away from the hangar line. I didn't see what was going on at the hangar line.

Marcello: I'm sure that in the aftermath of the attack that the base was one big rumor mill, was it not?

Runce: Oh, it was!

Marcello: What were some of the rumors you heard?

Runce: Well, the basic one was there was a lost division of Japs on the island. They had landed on Barbers Point and were in the mountains between Barbers Point and Schofield Barracks, which led to a funny incident there at Wheeler. The Air Corps had the interior guard. That was the area of the hangars and the length of the runway and the housing area. They had guards posted around the base buildings themselves, and I think the 31st Infantry . . . well, anyway some infantry had the outside perimeter, and somehow or another this lost division got down there at Wheeler Field, and the Air

Corps saw the infantry people, and they thought they were the Japs, and there was a little fire fight that went on for a couple of minutes till somebody called it off.

But you had to know the names of some of the guys. Nugent was one of the sergeants of the guard, and he liked to drink a lot of Aqua Velva, and the concensus of opinion among a lot of people was that he had been nipping some of this Aqua Velva prior to going on guard, and he was the one that actually started the firing.

But for three to five days there was rumor after rumor. I do know that some of the patrols that went into the little town of Wahiawa just outside Wheeler Field . . . these soldiers were in these trucks or jeeps and strafing indiscriminately into some of the buildings in the so-called poor part or the barrio part of town. It was one of the larger little towns on the island. The way they had it set up and running around, we didn't eat in any mess hall. The mess halls were open. The cooking complements were in the various mess halls, but to the best of my remembrance none of the troops were allowed to congregate in the mess halls. The food was

brought out into the field. In the area I was in the most we got was coffee and sandwiches, and the rumor got started that there wasn't enough supplies on the island--that we were going to be rationed right off the bat. I know that a lot of us had asked for more than one sandwich. No, one sandwich was it because they were beginning to ration food in this particular area that I was in.

The ordnance companies . . . we had had ammunition stored in the middle of the base prior to the attack, but during the lull or whatever you want to call it, we moved the ammunition into a building on the edge of the permanent cantonment or PX area.

I know I was given a detail to go on out and set up machine guns and keep guard of this ammo area. I had four or five troops, and I was sent out there to stay there till I was relieved, which I think was three days later. In the interim time I would periodically have to send one of the men out when it came time to eat, and I would have to send one of the men out to look for a feed point. A lot of times they wouldn't give him sandwiches and coffee to return to us. I mean, they thought that he was trying to hoard it himself. That was about the most major breakdown

of communications . . . and some people were just unlucky. They didn't get to the points where food was available. If they weren't there at the right time, they didn't get fed.

Marcello: In the aftermath of the attack did you try to find any scapegoats for what happened? Did you try to blame this disaster on anybody?

Runce: No, as far as the troops of our area . . . if you talk about blame, I can remember while we were being bombed and strafed we was asking, "Where in the hell's the Navy?" And finally it began to dawn on some of the people, "Well, hell. If they're doing that to us, what are they doing to the Navy?" I do remember for a period of time everybody was teed off at the Navy because, "Where in the hell is the Navy? How come they're not up here?" But as things quieted down and began to get organized, then people began to wonder, "Well, if they did this to us up here, what the hell did they do to the Navy down there?"

Marcello: Did you try to blame any individuals for the disaster?

Runce: My personal recollection is no. No, this was cooking for some time. Nobody thought they were going to do it, and it happened. And now it was a question of how we're going to get back to them. The other scare point was, as

I said, this so-called lost division that kept cropping up for the next probably ten days, especially at nighttime. During the daytime all these things you didn't think too much of them, but when it started to get dusk and the rumors of the Japanese lost division kept cropping up . . . and usually by midnight, well, it'd get pretty scarey.

Marcello: How do you think the Japanese were able to pull off this attack? Why were they successful? You, of course, would have to speculate here a great deal, I think.

Runce: I think it's strictly speculation and hindsight in as far as I'm concerned. By what I read, I think our people vacillated too much. The squadron I was to be attached to was supposed to have gone out to Wake Island just prior to the war. I know that I was told to assemble an ordnance platoon to go along with the fighter squadron that was going to Wake, and then all of a sudden they called it off. I think a squadron was supposed to have gone out to Midway. I know that I was considered for that squadron as a platoon sergeant. I was being considered being a platoon sergeant, but then they changed it to somebody else, but then at the last minute they didn't go. So I think there was a lot of vacillation among the command. As

far as orientation coming down to troops, we didn't hear too much. I mean, they didn't keep us too well informed. It was what we saw in the papers. Now maybe if I'd have been one of the first three-graders and had gone to the NCO Club, there might have been more going on in the way of conversation, but at my level at that particular time, among the people that I associated and was working with there was very little speculation as to what the Japs were going to do. Up to and after the attack . . . and then the speculation of . . . boy, when we saw what they did down at Pearl Harbor that shook everybody up. Then we found out that the aircraft carriers hadn't been hit. Oh, spirits kind of perked up from there. The rumors began to come on in about how many subs we were sinking in Pearl and just around the Hawaiian Islands. As a matter of fact, I think I kept a rough count. I think we got thirty-three submarines in twenty days.

Marcello: Strictly rumors, of course.

Runce: Strictly rumors, but there was some credit to the rumors. In the fighter squadron I was attached to, the squadron commander, a guy by the name of Evans, somehow or other talked the Navy out of giving him some "ash cans." So when our squadron was flying patrols . . . I forget just how . . . one squadron would be flying, you might say,

defense. In other words, they were ready to act as fighters. The other squadron would patrol, and one squadron was staying down for maintenance. If they were flying patrol, they would carry a bomb or in our case "ash cans" for anti-sub patrol. And as I would keep track of these submarines from what we saw in the newspaper, I'd also watch these ash cans on our planes, and we never dropped a single one. So from that time on I've always said that the next time we have a war we'd better get hold of these 007's and guys like that because they can do more damage with one grenade than the whole damn Army could with what they've got (chuckle). Some of the other squadrons, I know, dropped bombs, but they got more whales than they got submarines.

Marcello: I see.

Runce: I think the whale population in the Hawaiian Islands went down thirty-two whales and no submarines (chuckle).