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Joaquin Gomez
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Place of Interview: San Antonio, Texas
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
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Oral History Collection

Joaquin Gomez

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: San Antonio, Texas Date: August 24, 1974

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. Joaquin Gomez for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on August 24, 1974, in San Antonio, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Gomez in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was stationed at Schofield Barracks during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

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

Mr. Gomez: Oh, I was born in San Antonio, Texas, on July 18, 1920. My education goes as far back as the eighth grade in 1935. If you'll remember or know, because of the depression I had to go out and work. Since I was in school, I had made up my mind that I was going into the Army. So in 1939 I hitchhiked to Fort Brown in

Brownsville, which was the cavalry post. From there I went to Schofield Barracks.

Marcello: Okay, why did you try to enter the service in 1939?

Gomez: Well, jobs being as scarce as they were, I figured if I could go into the Army, at least I could travel a little bit and learn a little bit more about life. There would be one less mouth in my family to feed, since there were ten of us at the time.

Marcello: I see. You know, this is a reason a great many people give for entering the service around that time. It was a matter of economics, and the service represented a certain amount of security.

Gomez: Yes, it did. It sure did.

Marcello: Why did you decide upon the Army as opposed to one of the other branches of service?

Gomez: Well, in July I went to the Marine Corps, and he sort of . . . he didn't laugh, but he smiled because at that time the Marines were from 5'6" to 5'8" tall. They were all seagoing, so they had no use for a short man. As it was, I hardly made it in the Army with my height.

Marcello: Now you went directly from Fort Brown over to Schofield Barracks?

Gomez: Yes.

Marcello: This was a rather standard procedure, I think, in those days. You enlisted and went directly to your station and received your basic training there. It was kind of a little different than it is today.

Gomez: Right now they sent you to, like, Camp Pope for training, and then from there they send you to your station. Before, they trained you where you were being stationed.

Marcello: How did you like the idea of going to the Hawaiian Islands?

Gomez: In those days it was a big deal, you know. It was something like dessert after a meal, you know. Everybody at Fort Brown at that time was going on maneuvers at Fort Bliss, and they never did come back because they were mechanized. They pointed at me and said, "That guy's going to go to Hawaii," like something that was extra special.

Marcello: Okay, so you went to Schofield Barracks and you received your basic training there. Was there anything from your basic training that you think ought to be included as a part of this interview? Was there anything out of the ordinary that happened at boot camp, or was it mainly the standard Army training?

Gomez: No, it was the standard Army training. There was nothing out of the ordinary. They took all the recruits off the ship and dealt them out to a regiment here . . . you go to this regiment, you go to that regiment. From the interview they had there, they doled them out to companies.

Marcello: What did you do after you got out of boot camp?

Gomez: Well, I went to regular military duties, training in the mornings and afternoons where we'd go to what we called fatigue duty. There was cleaning up and things like that.

Marcello: What particular specialty or function did you have after you got out of boot camp? In other words, did you become a machine gunner, or were you in communications, or what exactly did you do?

Gomez: No, although I was assigned to a machine gun company, I went out as a bugler.

Marcello: As a bugler?

Gomez: Yes, and I must have been in there for quite awhile, a few months. Let's see, in June, the first part of 1941, I went back to duty, to strict duty with the company. I remember in June--I can't remember the date exactly--but we had an earthquake. It just scared the bejesus out of the whole bunch of us.

The next day we went out for assigned military duties in the morning. In the afternoon we went to fatigue duty, you know. In the early afternoon we were called back in by the provost sergeant. He said we were to report immediately back to the barracks. So we couldn't figure out what was going on, you know. So we went back to our companies, and we were placed on alert. From that day on, night and day, we were on patrol duty up until December 6.

Marcello: And the alert was called off on December 6.

Gomez: On December 6.

Marcello: Now when did this alert start?

Gomez: It must have been about June or July, 1941.

Marcello: How did these patrols operate?

Gomez: Well, we were broken down into different parts, so we could keep on a regular twenty-four hour basis. We'd go out on trucks and patrol around the wooded areas or different parts of the island. Every regiment was assigned a different part.

Marcello: Were you in a particular division here at Schofield Barracks? Now I know the 24th and the 25th Divisions were there, were they not?

Gomez: Yes, I was in the 24th Division.

Marcello: How often did you personally go on these patrols?

- Gomez: Well, about once or twice a day with the other two crews. We had to complete the patrol in twenty-four hours.
- Marcello: There were two crews on these patrols, usually?
- Gomez: Three.
- Marcello: Three crews. What were you supposed to be patrolling for? What were you supposed to be looking for?
- Gomez: Well, they were supposedly seeing Japanese ships off-limits. That's the story we got. We were also looking for subversives. I think that was the wrong way to describe the Japanese on the island then. As it turned out, there was no truer American than these Japanese.
- Marcello: At the time, that is, before Pearl Harbor, when you thought of a typical Japanese, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind?
- Gomez: Well, having met up with so many of them on the island, why, they were a very neat person, very neat. The family, the traditions, and . . . the respect that the families had for each other, including the children, astounded me. I sort of had a little respect for them, you know. As far as picturing him as an enemy, I never dreamed of this.
- Marcello: What was social life like for a young soldier in the Hawaiian Islands at this particular time? What did you do when you went on liberty?

- Gomez: Oh, the usual daring-do, you know, going out and having drinks. A lot of them would get wild and woolly, but luckily I wasn't like that. But usually I'd behave myself. Guys used to come back with black eyes and everything. Boy, we had a lot of fun, though! We'd have a lot of beach parties. At that time we could build us a bonfire and all. We started it and before you knew it two or three ukuleles would break out. These people, from the time they're able to walk, they'll sing and dance up until they die. This was quite a party.
- Marcello: When you usually went into town for entertainment, where did you usually go?
- Gomez: Well, we'd go on up to Honolulu.
- Marcello: That was a pretty long way from Schofield Barracks, wasn't it?
- Gomez: Well . . .
- Marcello: It was twenty-something miles, I think.
- Gomez: I think it was from twelve to fifteen miles. But they had the bus transportation. It was pretty regular. Then at that time they had the little train there, narrow gauge train.
- Marcello: Now I would assume that you couldn't go into Honolulu too often because you weren't getting too much money, were you?

Gomez: (Chuckle) No, at that time we were getting twenty-one dollars a month. After they took out for your Old Soldiers' Fund and your laundry, you wound up probably with eighteen or nineteen dollars a month. But the nice thing about it is . . . at least for me, my money lasted me all month.

Marcello: How often would you go into Honolulu?

Gomez: Oh, two or three times a month. Then we had the little town of Wahiawa just outside of Schofield Barracks. That was a nice little place.

Marcello: Now there were quite a few Japanese that lived there, were there not?

Gomez: Yes, there were.

Marcello: And I've heard it said that there was a bar or a restaurant there that was run by a Japanese who later turned out to be some sort of an agent. I don't know if you've ever heard that story or not.

Gomez: Yes, I believe I have. If I'm not mistaken . . . I can't remember. He had something like . . .

Marcello: I've heard the name Charlie Hasebe. Is that correct?

Gomez: I know . . . of course, these men had a big carnival-like thing going on behind the tank compound, but I can't remember the name of it. He turned out to be an officer in the Japanese Navy.

Marcello: But you did occasionally go into Wahiawa. How often did you get liberty?

Gomez: Every night.

Marcello: How about on the weekends? What sort of liberty did you get on the weekends?

Gomez: We'd go up for inspection on Saturday morning, and the afternoon and Sunday would be yours. It was the same way with payday. On payday we'd go out and drill for an hour or so and then some back and line up for payday.

Marcello: Of course, I assume you didn't get every weekend off because certain people would have duty of weekends, would they not?

Gomez: Yes.

Marcello: But normally how many weekends could you expect to have off in any given month.

Gomez: I'd say at least three.

Marcello: Three out of four? Now during this period of the alert, did the liberty routine change any?

Gomez: There was no liberty at all.

Marcello: There was no liberty at all?

Gomez: Hardly any.

Marcello: And this would have included liberty in the evenings as well as on weekends?

Gomez: Yes.

Marcello: In other words, you were more or less confined to the base during that period.

Gomez: Yes.

Marcello: Normally, when people would come off that liberty, that is, after they went into Honolulu on a Saturday night or something like that, what sort of condition would they be in when they came back on the base?

Gomez: (Chuckle) Well, the biggest percentage of them would be pretty well . . . you know . . . they would be in no shape . . . it took a scare like December 7 to really get them on their feet. You know what I mean? Motivate them, you might say.

Marcello: In other words, this was the general rule rather than the exception, that is, that when most people went into town on a Saturday night, and especially right after payday, they would usually come back fairly well intoxicated?

Gomez: Yes, most of them, and besides, with the idea that they didn't have to get up on Sunday morning, why . . . then a lot of them would live downtown.

Marcello: In other words, if they had leave on the weekend, they would usually stay there rather than come back to the base.

Gomez: Yes.

Marcello: I imagine they couldn't do this too often, considering the pay that they were receiving?

Gomez: A lot of them would stick to the base and go to the beer garden because you could get beer chips and then pay for them later on after payday.

Marcello: When was payday?

Gomez: It used to come at the end of the month.

Marcello: So, in other words, on that weekend of December 7, would you have had a relatively large amount of money? Of would you have spent most of your money by that time?

Gomez: No, I'd have some. Actually, you could come and go. Then if you didn't get a room in Honolulu to stay for the night, you know, you could always come back to the base and go back again Sunday morning.

Marcello: How safe and secure did you feel in the Hawaiian Islands as the relations between the United States and Japan continued to grow worse?

Gomez: Well, we felt pretty secure because at that time we were . . . no one except the Japanese, of course, had an idea of the air conflict. We figured, well, if they tried to land, why, we've got enough men to repel them. For a naval attack, why, we've got a Navy here. But nobody

ever thought of the air. That's why . . . well, we were still back in the World War I days, you know, getting lectures in World War I tactics and all of that. It was the biggest mistake--not updating our methods.

Marcello: What was the morale like in the Army during that period before Pearl Harbor.

Gomez: Very high.

Marcello: How do you account for that?

Gomez: Well, mostly because the men were there because that was their life. They had enlisted and they were ready for anything.

Marcello: In other words, they were there because they wanted to be there.

Gomez: That's right. You didn't hear anything about, oh, "my identity" or anything. A soldier was a soldier and he acted like a soldier, and he wanted to be a soldier. That's what he was. I had had arguments with people that say that at that time the Army was a bunch of bums and all of that. Well, if you remember a further discussion here about the depression, I've seen my share of musicians, architects, engineers, because there were no jobs. So actually you couldn't say they were a bunch of bums.

Marcello: Well, in a great many cases, I gather that the military could be highly selective at that time because of the limited budget that the military had and the large number of people that wanted to get in.

Gomez: Definitely.

Marcello: So I gather they could kind of pick and choose whomever they wanted.

Gomez: Besides, there was no lowering of the tests, of the testing. Either you make that test or you didn't get in.

Marcello: Okay, this more or less brings us up to the days immediately prior to Pearl Harbor. What I'd like you to do at this point is to describe to me in as much detail as you can remember what you did on that Saturday of December 6, 1941. From there, we'll move into the Sunday itself. Let's start with the Saturday first of all. What can you remember from your activities on that Saturday? Now the alert was called off on that Saturday.

Gomez: Well, we put our guns back in the supply room and locked them up.

Marcello: Incidentally, when you were on those patrols during the period of this alert, did you have live ammunition?

Gomez: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, continue with your story. Was this unusual to have live ammunition on the alerts on maneuvers and so on?

Gomez: Well, when we were just on maneuvers, there would be no live ammunition. But on this . . . so we figured there was something in the air, you know. The farthest thing from my mind was . . . from our minds was that anything like a Japanese attack would be taking place.

Marcello: Okay, so you came in off the alert, and the guns were turned in, the rifles were turned in, and they were locked up, of course, as well as the ammunition. So what did you do from that point then?

Gomez: Well, actually, on the Saturday I can't remember hardly anything at all.

Marcello: Did you go into Honolulu?

Gomez: No, if I remember I took in a movie and then went over to the beer garden and came back to base.

Marcello: Do you recall approximately what time you went to bed that evening?

Gomez: No.

Marcello: Was it after midnight or before midnight?

Gomez: Oh, way before midnight.

Marcello: Way before midnight.

Gomez: Because we'd come back in and gone to the day room to read.

Marcello: What was your rank at that time?

Gomez: I was a PFC.

Marcello: Now during the night do you remember anything about the men who were gradually drifting back on the base after a weekend or a night, I should say, in Honolulu?

Gomez: Well, they'd drift in one or two at a time, you know. Some of them would be a little noisy, and others would try to be quiet. Of course, stumbling around in the dark, you know, they'd be . . . but other than that, there was nothing unusual or out of the ordinary that I can remember.

Marcello: Okay, that brings us to that Sunday morning of December 7, 1941. Once more, I'll ask you to describe your activities on that day from the time you got up till the time you went to bed that evening. I mean, until all hell broke loose, I should say.

Gomez: Well, on Sunday it was usual procedure to go through the kitchen, pick up a plate, pick up a bottle of milk, and the cook would put two eggs or whatever you wanted on your plate. Usually, it was just eggs, you know. Then

you'd go to the mess hall and sit down and start eating. That's what I did.

Marcello: But on the other hand, Sunday was a day of leisure, and you really didn't have to get up if you didn't want to.

Gomez: No. If you wanted to get up, why, you'd get up. If not, why . . .

Marcello: What time did you get up that particular morning? Do you remember?

Gomez: It was about seven o'clock. I cleaned up, you know.

Marcello: Now where was the mess hall located in relation to your barracks?

Gomez: Well, every company had its own mess hall.

Marcello: In other words, the mess hall was right in the barracks.

Gomez: Right in the barracks just below us. We'd go out in the street and come in through the street side and through the galley. I picked up my plate, two pieces of toast, some cereal, a bottle of milk, two eggs. There was somebody sitting at the table, so I went over and joined him. As I sat my plate on the table, the first explosion took place. I said, "Oh, what's going on?" That guy said, "I don't know." So I'm about to sit down, and the second explosion took place.

Marcello: Now were these explosions taking place over at Pearl Harbor?

Gomez: At Pearl Harbor, yes, but they sure sounded like they were right under you. So I went out to look, and at that time one of the planes was pulling up over our barracks. I looked at the big red ball on it, and I got the picture right away.

Marcello: How low was this plane?

Gomez: It must have been about a hundred feet or so. I don't know whether he dropped his bombs at Pearl and then came through and strafed Schofield or Wheeler Field, which was right next to it. That's why he was so low. But he was . . . we could see the pilot and the gunner behind him. I said, "The Japanese are bombing Pearl Harbor!" All you had to do was look over there to the distance, and you could see smoke and everything coming up.

Marcello: Did you have a pretty good view of Pearl Harbor from where Schofield was?

Gomez: No. If I remember correctly, what you could see was a big crane they used to have. In almost every picture of Pearl Harbor you can see that crane.

Marcello: But you could see the smoke billowing up.

Gomez: The smoke, and the planes going back and forth. You could actually see the bombs dropping.

Marcello: What were your reactions? What were your emotions when you saw this taking place?

Gomez: Well, the first thing was to get scared. After that, why, I went over and told . . . I don't remember who it was. I said, "The Japanese are bombing Pearl Harbor!" That was the only thing that it could be. That person in no uncertain language told me what to do about my idea. So I went out and about that time Pearl had really broken up. It happened that the man with the keys to the supply room where our guns were was in town. He had the keys with him. So we took the fire ax and broke the lock off it and broke out guns out--machine guns.

Marcello: Now by the time you had broken out the guns, had any of the planes strafed or bombed Schofield Barracks?

Gomez: Well, in our regiment they didn't strafe anything. But I understand 27th, they did. But no, they didn't do anything but scare us.

Marcello: Okay, so you broke out the machine guns. What happened from that point?

Gomez: So by then the alert call had sounded. All the troops had come out, and men were not dragging their BAR, which

weighs fifteen pounds, dragged a case of ammunition out with them. By the time the case of ammunition was broken out, why, everything was over. Another guy comes out with a .45 shooting up at the planes. We lined up together with the rest of the companies in the regiment. We lined up our guns, and we started firing.

Marcello: Where did you set up your guns?

Gomez: Right on the quadrangle.

Marcello: Were they out in the open?

Gomez: Right out in the open, yes. They were Browning machine guns, and they had to be water-cooled. We fired them without any water in them. The gun that me and this other man were manning, we fired a belt and a half, and it froze because there was no water in it.

Marcello: About how long were you firing at these planes?

Gomez: Oh, about fifteen or twenty minutes, half an hour.

Marcello: Would you say that, generally speaking, most of the men were acting in a rather professional manner rather than with a sense of panic or confusion or something of this nature?

Gomez: Really professional. After the initial shock, why, they went at it.

Marcello: While you were out there firing at these Japanese planes, did you come under any attack yourself?

Gomez: No, no, we didn't.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that the Japanese really weren't too worried about Schofield Barracks and that everything they did there was more or less done as an afterthought, that is, after they had done what they had intended to do at Wheeler Field or Pearl Harbor or at Hickam Field . . . in other words, they didn't drop too many bombs at Schofield Barracks. Most of the action there consisted of strafing.

Gomez: Strafing, yes. They had us landlocked. They weren't worried about us. Once they hit our Navy, why, we couldn't go anywhere.

Marcello: Now how long was Schofield actually under attack during this period?

Gomez: Oh, I would say about maybe forty-five minutes.

Marcello: And were you out there firing your machine gun all this time, or most of this time?

Gomez: Most of this time.

Marcello: What sort of damage was done at Schofield?

Gomez: Well, in our quadrangle on the 21st there was no damage done at all. From what I hear, in the 27th they strafed

the place. Actually, Wheeler Field was right next . . . well, closer to them than it was to us. Like you said, Schofield Barracks was an afterthought.

After that, why, we got all our gear together that we would take out in the field. We went up to a grove of trees and stayed there for, oh, till . . . all that night.

Marcello: What did you do while you were out there?

Gomez: We sent out patrols, and in the confusion, why, the National Guard and our troops . . . they weren't kind of coordinated in all of the confusion and all of that. No passwords were given. They had quite a fire-fight there among their own troops.

Marcello: I would assume that there were quite a lot of trigger-happy servicemen around that night.

Gomez: Oh, yes, indeed, especially in the patrols, you know. We'd get on the trucks, you know, and go out patrolling the area.

Marcello: Were you driving under black-out conditions?

Gomez: Yes.

Marcello: It must have been pretty tough driving around in the dark.

Gomez: Well, we were more or less familiar with the terrain down there. So unless it was pitch dark, why, we knew more or less where we were going.

Marcello: What were some of the rumors that you heard floating around at this time?

Gomez: Oh, we heard that there were Japanese paratroopers out on some part of the island and all that.

Marcello: Then did you believe all of those rumors?

Gomez: Well, it was hard not to believe them. After what happened this morning, why, you were afraid not to. Actually, I think that it was their biggest mistake.

Marcello: You mean the fact that they did not land?

Gomez: Yes.

Marcello: What was your feeling toward the Japanese in the aftermath of the attack? Did your feelings toward them change any?

Gomez: No, not particularly because I'd been there well over a year and had often talked to them, you know. I'd usually go out to a restaurant and talk to the waitress and people and get their feelings, you know. The high schools were as American as they could be. So it was those on the other side of the water that my feeling changed toward. We didn't know what kind of people those Japanese were.

Marcello: Now what did you do the following day, that is, on December 8?

Gomez: On December 8, why, we were assigned to our regular sector, so we started digging gun positions.

Marcello: Was this somewhere along the beach?

Gomez: Along the beach and up in the mountains. Then we had to go into private homes, you know, that were in our lines of fire. We'd go in and dig our gun emplacements for our field of fire.

Marcello: In other words, did you have to evacuate some of these people in the private homes and this sort of thing?

Gomez: No, we didn't evacuate them unless anything happened, you know. Then we would.

Marcello: Were there any funny things that happened during the attack that you can remember, whether they were done accidentally or on purpose?

Gomez: Actually, I can't remember any funny things. After the attack was over my heart went back to the right place again. We looked at each other and said, "We're in it up to our necks!" So there we were.

Marcello: Did you see any particular acts of bravery on the part of individuals during the attack?

Gomez: No, not at Schofield Barracks.

Marcello: In other words, it was mainly a matter of everybody doing his job in a professional sense. In the aftermath

of the attack, did you blame anybody for what happened?
Did you try to find any scapegoats or anything of this
nature?

Gomez: That is one thing that has always puzzled me. Why
December 6? Why not August or . . . December 6.

Marcello: You mean December 7.

Gomez: No, when we were taken off the alert.

Marcello: Oh, I see.

Gomez: And why the indifference of the big wheels, you know,
not to follow up on what the radarmen had reported.

Marcello: You're referring now to Lockard, who saw the Japanese
planes coming in from the north, that is, he saw them
coming in on the radar, and when he reported this to
the proper authorities, they simply told him that it
was a flight of B-17's coming in.

Gomez: Well, he told him to forget it or something like that.
What he should have done, he should have investigated.
These radarmen were there for something, not to be
told to forget what they saw.