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Interview with

Robert Warren Saunders

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Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved:

Robert W. Saunders
(Signature)

Date:

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Oral History Collection

Robert W. Saunders

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Robert Saunders for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on December 3, 1977, in Dallas, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Saunders in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was stationed at Schofield Barracks during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor and the surrounding military installations on December 7, 1941.

Now Mr. Saunders, to begin this interview, 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. Saunders: Well, I was born in Leechberg, Pennsylvania, on March 12, 1918. It's in the greater Pittsburgh area of Pennsylvania. The incidents leading up to my going to Hawaii . . . I was in college at Penn State University during the first draft and was

lucky enough to have a number come up on the first draft, and I was deferred until June, so that I could finish that school year. I still lacked one semester of having my degree.

Marcello: What year was that?

Saunders: The first draft was in November of 1940, as I recall, and I was deferred until June of '41.

Marcello: How closely were you keeping abreast of the current events and world affairs at that particular time?

Saunders: Well, rather closely because this was a time when the first draft started, and it was "good-bye, dear, I'll be back in a year," and some of my friends were called immediately. I was fortunate in that I could finish out that school year, and I asked for an extension to finish out the last semester that I needed, but I couldn't get that. So I was about to be drafted. I went home from Penn State and began to check on the possibilities of enlisting in the Army, and I finally decided to enlist for Hawaii.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enlist in the Army rather than one of the other branches of the service?

Saunders: Well, I tried the Marines, but I wore glasses and my eyesight, I guess, was one of the things that kept me out. Probably it was just as well. I wasn't too much

interested in the Navy. So I picked the Army, and I thought possibly by enlisting I could get into an Army band. I'd had some musical background, experience, but it turned out I just enlisted for Hawaii in the regular Army.

Marcello: Now this is interesting, and maybe we need to pursue what you've just said a little bit farther. You mentioned that you were promised Hawaii.

Saunders: Oh, yes.

Marcello: You enlisted for Hawaii.

Saunders: I enlisted for Hawaii.

Marcello: How did this procedure work?

Saunders: Well, at the time, the recruiting officers were accepting enlistees and giving them a choice. I had a choice of the Philippines or the Panama Canal Zone or Hawaii, and I chose Hawaii. I had read an article in Collier's magazine about impregnable Pearl Harbor and thought maybe that I could be out there in the middle of the ocean and no one would bother me.

Marcello: When you thought of the possibility of war at that particular time, without putting words in your mouth is it safe to say that you were looking more toward Europe than you were toward the Far East?

Saunders: Oh, yes, I think so. That's where the war was as far

as I was concerned, and as far as most of us were concerned, I believe. We could still remember reading about World War I, and this was sort of a repeat of World War I, it seemed. The Pacific war was a nebulous thing that you just didn't concentrate too much on.

Marcello: Okay, so you enlisted in or near Pittsburgh. Where did you go from there?

Saunders: Oh, I was sent to Fort Slocum, New York. It's a little island in Long Island Sound near New Rochelle, and I was there for, oh, possibly two weeks until a sufficient number of enlistees arrived, and then we were sent cross-country by troop train to San Francisco, to Fort McDowell on Angel Island. Angel Island is in San Francisco Bay. We were there possibly a week or ten days, and then we were shipped to Hawaii and took our basic training in Hawaii.

Marcello: You more-or-less answered my next question. During this entire process, you had really had no training as such.

Saunders: No.

Marcello: You were just waiting for a sufficient number of recruits or volunteers to come along for passage to the Hawaiian Islands.

Saunders: That's correct, yes. We had minor duties at Fort Slocum, and some that weren't so minor like KP at Fort McDowell; but otherwise, it was just a matter of getting over to Hawaii to take our basic training.

Marcello: Now when you got to Hawaii, did you proceed directly to Schofield Barracks?

Saunders: Yes.

Marcello: Describe what Schofield looked like from the physical standpoint. It was a pretty big post, was it not?

Saunders: Oh, yes, it was tremendous, and I wasn't familiar with Army posts. Yet we were assigned to a regiment. Our basic training was conducted within the regimental set-up, and the regiment was just a small area--a quadrangle, really--and so our whole life was pretty much centered in that quadrangle.

Marcello: And when you say that your life was pretty much centered in that quadrangle, you slept there, you ate there; virtually the entire life of the regiment was carried on there.

Saunders: Right, that's correct. Each one of the battalions of the regiment--35th Infantry Regiment--had a building on one side of the quadrangle, and then the fourth side was the headquarters and service company of the regiment.

Marcello: Just for the record, would you identify your unit in full? That is, the unit to which you were assigned when you got to Schofield Barracks.

Saunders: Yes, I was assigned to M Company, 3rd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment. It was in that company that I took my basic training.

Marcello: Describe what your quarters were like there at Schofield--your barracks, in other words.

Saunders: Well, barracks--that's a good way to describe them. They were just big sleeping rooms with row after row of bunks. All were very properly made up and tailored each morning. The mess hall was on the first floor of the barracks, and the company commander's office and various offices also were on the first floor.

Marcello: Now did each company have a mess hall, or was there a central mess hall for the entire regiment?

Saunders: No, each company had its own mess hall, and certain mess halls . . . as I recall . . . well, later on I was on detached service with the 35th Infantry band, and the band ate in M Company mess hall, so that as I recall, headquarters company had a mess hall and service company possibly, but some of the special troops may have eaten in some other company mess hall.

Marcello: What was the food like in that pre-Pearl Harbor Army?

Saunders: Oh, it was pretty good food--no complaints there. It was wholesome food, and I think the thing that I possibly remember after so many years is that it wasn't always just scrambled eggs in the morning. Every once in awhile, especially on the weekends, you could go in and order your eggs sunnyside up. It wasn't quite gourmet eating, but it wasn't all that bad.

Marcello: What was the morale like in the Army at that time? Now again, we're up to--what--May of 1941? When did you say you were in the service?

Saunders: I got in in June.

Marcello: Okay.

Saunders: As I recall, it was June 27, 1941, and I got to Hawaii about mid-July or late July.

Marcello: I would assume that there was a rather extensive build-up taking place at that time.

Saunders: Yes, although as a recruit, I couldn't be aware too much of the overall picture except in my immediate environs, but there was a build-up. The troopship was full as we went to Hawaii. And you ask about morale--I think morale was good. Most of the GI's in the regiment in Hawaii were regulars. A few of us were . . . although we were regulars, we had

signed up for a full three-year term in the regular Army.

Marcello: You were regulars under duress (chuckle).

Saunders: (Chuckle) At least not by choice, right. Most of the fellows in the outfit were regular Army. A few of us--I remember particularly a couple of fellows--were teachers that I sort of palled around with and were in under similiar circumstances. They were about to be drafted and instead had chosen to enlist. But the morale was good, and many of the fellows that were there in Hawaii had been over there for years and had reenlisted and had a little period of leave in the United States or on the Mainland, as they said over there, and then were returning on the ship with me to Hawaii and were sort of picking up where they left off.

Marcello: Theoretically, I think, at that time one could virtually spend his entire Army career in one post under certain circumstances.

Saunders: Yes, and in one outfit. I remember working later with a warrant officer who had started as a private in the same outfit and had worked up through the ranks and had become a warrant officer and was still in the 35th Infantry. Virtually all of his time was in the 35th Infantry.

Marcello: This same procedure could also occur aboard the various ships. A person spent twenty years on the same ship.

Saunders: I expect so, yes. It seems that those fellows, those regulars, who liked the Hawaiian duty just kept re-enlisting and going back. They had their homes over there, and they lived off post with their families, and they just went to work each day.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about your basic training since you did take it here at Schofield. How long did it last?

Saunders: Oh, interminably! I would have to say about three months. I'm not sure about that timing, but it seemed like forever. I had had two years of ROTC at Penn State, and I was helped considerably by that in my basic training. But the basic training was tough--it was rigid--and they really put us through the ropes and really got us in physical shape--good physical shape. I know that it must have been three months because it seems like after the basic training I became a private instead of a recruit. I also got a raise from twenty-one dollars a month to thirty dollars a month. But the basic training was very good, and it made a real soldier out of you without a question

of a doubt.

Marcello: Now what particular function did you assume after you got out of basic training?

Saunders: Although I was assigned to M Company as a machine gunner, because of my musical background--I'd played in dance bands while I was in college--I got assigned on detached service to the band, the regimental band, and I was in the band at the time of the attack.

Marcello: What particular instrument did you play?

Saunders: Well, I played several different instruments. I had mainly played drums through college, but I think I played saxophone and trombone and just about . . . I played a good many instruments--not well, but I played most anything in the band over there.

Marcello: How did life in the band compare or contrast with the routine that one of the soldiers might have had in one of the regular regiments?

Saunders: Well, I would have to say it was easier, because while . . . while the infantrymen . . . of course, we were all infantry. But while the riflemen were out practicing with a rifle, we were practicing on our particular instruments for the band. However, the band still had to do their physical training, and they still had to perform at all the functions and perform guard duty and

so on and so forth.

Marcello: About how many hours a day would you devote to band practice?

Saunders: Oh, it was an all-day thing. You would have individual practice time, and then different sections of the band would practice, and then you would have the entire band practicing. It was a constant, all-day job. So it wasn't that we worked any less; we just possibly didn't work quite as hard.

Marcello: And you were doing something that you probably wanted to do.

Saunders: That's right, and at that time I had hoped maybe I would do something musically, but I later changed my mind.

Marcello: What were the band facilities like here in your regiment?

Saunders: Exactly the same as the company quarters. They were barracks, and then there was a hall or a large room, I should say, that was the band room where we practiced. Then we had to practice our drilling. We had to get out and practice our drilling and marching and so on and so forth.

Marcello: Did the regiment seem to take quite a bit of pride in the band? How important was the band in terms of regimental competition and so on?

Saunders: Oh, it was very important because there was a lot of

pomp and ceremony in the Army in the prewar years, and the bands were very much a part of this. There were also a lot of regimental events--regimental boxing teams and football teams, baseball teams--and the band participated in the sports program just as they do in the college programs now.

Marcello: And would one regimental band perhaps compete against another regimental band and this sort of thing?

Saunders: Well, I don't recall any particular competition or any particular award for superiority, but there was a competitive spirit, I think, between bands.

Marcello: I know that in the Navy, for example, some of the bands on the larger battleships would compete against one another in the so-called "Battle of the Bands" and so on.

Saunders: It sounds like a good idea, and it could have been, but I just don't recall any of those, But I do recall playing at a lot of sporting events.

Marcello: You know, I think all these things also were certainly a factor in bringing about a high degree of morale. There was a great deal of competition in terms of sports or the band or various other things, and it seems to me that this would help to maintain high morale.

Saunders: Oh, yes. I remember that my company commander or the

company commander of Company M . . . let's see, I've got his name right here--Captain Groves. As I recall, he played football for Army when he was at West Point, and he was the football coach for our particular regimental team. And we had some very good boxing events over there--lots of activities along that line.

Marcello: And I gather that whenever there were any of these athletic events, the whole regiment showed up.

Saunders: Oh, yes. They were some of the best entertainment we had, really. We had the opportunity to go into town, so to speak, on a pass or with a Class A card--into Honolulu--but these were the events that really captured our attention. And it was the same later. After I came back, I became an officer in charge of athletics and recreation in an infantry regiment, and we had boxing and baseball and sports that were very much a part of the program there, too.

Marcello: At what type of functions would the regimental band be playing there at Schofield?

Saunders: Well, at parades. And they performed every . . . well, almost every day at guard mount, formal guard mount. You'd have regimental parades; you'd have some of the bigger parades when the whole . . . several regiments would participate on the parade ground with each regiment

having their own band. So it was a constant thing; you were performing at some sort of a function every day.

Marcello: Would you also perform at social functions, such as dances and things of that nature? Or would that be handled in a different manner?

Saunders: I don't remember too much about functions of that kind. I don't remember going to a regimental dance of any kind over there or performing for any.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about your liberty routine here at Schofield Barracks. How did it work?

Saunders: Well, during your period of training--your basic training--there was no liberty. It almost became a problem to run to the PX. After the basic training, then you could sometimes get a weekend pass. And then after . . . I don't know the period of time exactly, but after a certain period of time, you were issued a Class A card which enabled you to leave the post as long as you were not on duty. On weekends you could go into Honolulu, which we did on many occasions.

Marcello: How far was Schofield from Honolulu?

Saunders: Oh, I think about thirty miles, maybe not quite that far--twenty or thirty miles.

Marcello: Was it very difficult to get into Honolulu?

Saunders: Oh, no, there were busses running all the time--no problem at all.

Marcello: How often would you get into Honolulu?

Saunders: Well, probably every couple of weeks.

Marcello: Would lack of money have been the limiting factor more than anything else?

Saunders: Very much so, yes. At thirty dollars a month, you didn't stay in the Royal Hawaiian too often unless you had a little other source of income.

Marcello: If you were looking for some recreation off the base but not in Honolulu, where might you go?

Saunders: Well, there were a couple of smaller towns near Schofield Barracks, and I don't know whether I'm going to remember the names of them. Wahiawa was one of them, and . . .

Marcello: That's the one, I think, that's most commonly mentioned by the servicemen.

Saunders: I think it probably had more beer gardens and points of entertainment, shall we say, than most of the others.

Marcello: It was not a very big place, was it?

Saunders: No. And really, you'd go in there and have a couple of beers or something, and that was about it.

Marcello: I've heard that just about every place in Wahiawa was run by the Japanese.

Saunders: Oh, yes. that's true. And all sorts of rumors floated

around about the Japanese running these places and even having a taxi service to pick you up at the gate and bring you back.

Marcello: Were these rumors rampant even prior to December 7th?

Saunders: Oh, yes, yes.

Marcello: What did you do personally when you went on liberty, either in Wahiawa or Honolulu? Maybe your routine would vary.

Saunders: Yes, it would vary. I remember one time going to the Royal Hawaiian and spending the Saturday night there and just living in the lap of luxury. Then I guess it took me a couple of weeks to recover from that-- financially, that is. However, I did have some friends that lived in Honolulu. They were really friends of friends--I should say acquaintances possibly--but we were entertained . . . I was entertained by them on a couple of occasions at their home. The rest of the time, it would be just probably go in, maybe do a little shopping or looking around, seeing some of the sights. It was mainly sightseeing, I guess, for me; I was interested in that.

Marcello: I've heard it said that a lot of the Army personnel would actually stay away from Honolulu on the weekends because the place would be so crowded. In other words,

on the weekend the fleet would be coming in, and downtown Honolulu would be virtually wall-to-wall sailors.

Saunders: Well, that's right. That's right. And for that reason I very seldom spent the night in there. We'd go in and, as I say, do a little sightseeing or a little shopping or roaming around and then come back to Schofield Barracks.

Marcello: I guess there weren't too many places where you could stay in Honolulu overnight, were there?

Saunders: If there were, I didn't know about them. And some of them, I guess maybe I wouldn't have chosen to call home for a night.

Marcello: Well, here again, I do know that in the case of the fleet, most of the sailors had to be back aboard ship by midnight simply because there was no place to stay in Honolulu.

Saunders: I think that's probably right.

Marcello: The only ones that could usually stay overnight were those who had a house ashore or who were married or something of that nature.

Saunders: Yes, yes. And then, of course, that was true with the men of Schofield Barracks, too. A lot of them were regulars and had been over there for a long time. They

were married and had their homes in town, and they would leave the post and go home for the weekend.

Marcello: On a weekend, what percentage of the personnel might be off the base. Now you'd have to estimate this, of course.

Saunders: Yes, that would be hard for me to say. I'd say up to 50 per cent at one time or another, and yet I can remember that there were some . . . I don't know if I should call them alert periods or training periods when you were not allowed to leave the base on the weekends.

Marcello: And I would assume that during the weekends, people were coming and going all the time. Is that correct?

Saunders: Yes, yes. Weekends really started at noon on Saturday, as I recall. It seems to me that we had duty until noon on Saturday. And, of course, very often in the fall and much of the time I was there before Pearl Harbor, there would be football games on Saturday afternoon. So there was something to do there on the post that would keep men from going into town.

Marcello: Now the next question is kind of a loaded one, but I have to ask just to get your opinion, if for no other reason. Many people like to assume that if some enemy, whether it be the Japanese or somebody else, were going to attack Pearl Harbor, the best time to have done so

would have been on a Sunday morning. What many people assume is that Saturday nights were times of a great deal of heavy drinking and partying and things of this nature, and consequently the personnel would be in no shape to fight on a Sunday morning. How would you answer an assumption of that sort on the basis of your own observations?

Saunders: Well, I think Saturday nights are a little bit that way now anywhere, whether you're in Schofield B racks or Pearl Harbor or Dallas, Texas, or anywhere regardless of the time. I think this was traditionally a party night, and I think it was mainly because many people don't have to get up early on Sunday mornings. So I would have to say, yes, I would think Sunday morning as the time to attack. I don't know that it was any worse there than anywhere else, though. I certainly wasn't hungover on Sunday morning, and I didn't see any evidence of anymore than the usual Saturday evening leaves, passes, and trips into town that would lead me to think there was anything unusual at all.

Marcello: I think you hit upon something awhile ago that's kind of important. You mentioned that people could sleep in on Sunday mornings. Sundays were a day of leisure if they didn't have the duty.

Saunders: That's right. There was essentially no duty on Sunday, other than guard duty and certain other jobs that had to be done; but generally speaking, it was the only day of the week that you could sleep in. Then, of course, some of us got up and went to church or chapel or whatever, but you didn't have to get up as early Sunday morning as you did other mornings. As a matter of fact, breakfast wasn't until 7:45 or eight o'clock on Sunday mornings.

Marcello: And as you mentioned, you could more or less select the way you wanted the cook to make your eggs, and I would assume, therefore, that not a whole lot of people necessarily made breakfast on a Sunday morning.

Saunders: That's exactly right. It was a day of leisure. It wasn't that way every morning when you were having breakfast at the usual early hour. So it was a day of leisure, but, like I said earlier, I believe it was no more so there than anywhere else even today.

Marcello: In other words, the Army at that time was more or less a mirror or a reflection of civilian life.

Saunders: Sure, it was a job.

Marcello: Okay, now as one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate, could you sense any

changes in your routine? If so, what were they?

Saunders: Yes, we realized that we were getting closer to some sort of a confrontation probably. Hopefully not, but it looked like we were. They tightened up on our passes into town.

We had an alert, I guess . . . I think that's what the term used was--a Class 3 alert, it seemed to be, whatever that meant. I'm not sure now. We were not permitted to leave the post on Saturday or Sunday, and although nothing developed, it was just an alert which showed our readiness. As we approached December, I don't know that they were all that frequent, but there was certainly a trend in that direction.

Marcello: Do you recall if there were any maneuvers during that week or so prior to the attack where . . . or an alert, if you want to call it that, where units were going out into the field and things of that sort?

Saunders: I don't recall if there were any more than usual. Of course, the Army was at Schofield Barracks mainly to protect against invasion. That was the duty, I guess, or the reason for the Army being there--to prevent a possible invasion. And there were assigned beach positions. Each outfit, each unit, of the Army had its assigned beach position in the event of an alert.

And there were alerts when we would automatically take our positions. There was one fairly close to the time before Pearl Harbor. I can't say exactly when it was, but I don't think . . . I didn't feel like this was anything unusual.

Marcello: As a member of the band, would you be going out into the field with your unit and so on?

Saunders: No, no. Actually, the function of the band during an alert was to take over interior guard. And you're probably aware that there was always one company assigned guard duty and the patrol of the regimental area--regimental guard duty every night. The band escaped this routine duty, but it was the function of the band to take over interior guard in the event the troops were out in the field in the beach positions. I don't really remember whether we ever did it on any of these alerts, because it seems like the troops got back in time to take over their interior guard duty. I think we practiced taking over the guard duty along with the alert, but I don't really remember walking guard duty until after the attack.

Marcello: How seriously were these alerts taken by the ordinary, run-of-the-mill troops?

Saunders: I think just as part of routine training. Everybody

felt like we were being trained to do a job, and this was all a part of the training. Oh, there would be lots of gripping when you didn't get to sleep in your own bunk that night or something, but other than that it was the usual routine. I believe everyone felt like it was just part of the routine training.

Marcello: All during this period, were you keeping abreast with current events? Were you following world affairs and reading papers and magazines and so on?

Saunders: Yes, I think so--pretty much. I had a couple magazines that were sent to me routinely over there. I like to think I was about as well-versed as I could be under the circumstances.

Marcello: How safe and secure did you feel there in the Hawaiian Islands as the count-down toward the Pearl Harbor attack began?

Saunders: I never gave it a thought--never gave it a thought. I guess we all realized that in a war situation we were in the Army, and we might be sent to where the action was, but I don't know that any of us felt like there'd be much action there--and especially in the infantry, as far as an invasion was concerned.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese during that pre-Pearl Harbor period, what sort of an individual

did you usually conjure up in your own mind?

Saunders: Well, of course, there were lots of Japanese there. Our regimental tailor was a Jap. As I recall--and I don't know that I'll have the statistics just exactly correct--but as I recall, we said that approximately a third of the people living on Oahu were Japanese. So they were all around us. They were working in the PX; they were working in the tailor shop, the barber shop, anywhere else. And we sort of thought nothing of it.

And, of course, there were so many other Orientals there--a lot of Chinese, a lot of the other South Seas Islanders, so to speak--and they were all sort of lumped together in our mind. I don't know that we tried to separate them too much except possibly the Japanese. We were more inclined to separate them because we knew of the possible confrontation with the Japanese.

Marcello: Okay, I think this brings us up to those days immediately prior to the attack itself, Mr. Saunders, so why don't we talk about that weekend of December 7, 1941. Should we start with the Friday and proceed through Saturday and Sunday, or how do you think we should proceed at this point?

Saunders: Well, Friday, I think . . . I can't recall anything different about Friday or Saturday. I didn't go into

town; I stayed on the post. Friday and Saturday, as far as our activities were concerned, were very much the same. I was aware that there was a conference scheduled, too, between the Japanese government and the American government for sometime a little later-- I'd been reading that in the paper--and so we were very much aware of this situation at the time. But Saturday, as far as we were concerned, and as far as I was concerned, went on as any other Saturday.

Marcello: Do you recall what you did on this Saturday?

Saunders: No, I don't recall anything particular that was any different from any other Saturday.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into Sunday morning then. What I want you to do at this stage is to describe your routine from the time you got up until all hell broke loose.

Saunders: Well, that was a short span. As I said earlier, breakfast was about 7:45 to eight o'clock; you didn't have to jump in at exactly the minute on Sunday morning like other days. Since the band barracks were . . . well, just a few yards away from Company M in the quadrangle, I was on my way from the band barracks to M Company to eat breakfast when we saw planes.

Marcello: Now were you out in the open when you saw the planes?

Saunders: Yes. I just had left the band barracks and was going across the quarter of the quadrangle over to M Company and walking with a couple of other fellows. We saw the planes and heard the noise from the bombing.

Marcello: Now was this activity actually taking place there at Schofield, or was this at Wheeler?

Saunders: No, this was at Wheeler or possibly even . . . well, I'm not sure whether the bombing of Pearl Harbor and Hickam Field and Wheeler all took place simultaneously or not, but it was at least down as far as Wheeler Field and possibly farther on down toward Pearl Harbor. But I think our comment was, "Well, Sunday morning at this hour seems like a strange time for maneuvers or practice maneuvers of any kind." Someone said, "Well, this could be the real thing!" We couldn't see too much at the moment, so we said, "Well, we'll go on in and get some breakfast, and then we'll know more of what's going on." Well, we went in and got some breakfast . . . and, of course, that's when we had just gone into the mess hall and possibly had gotten some breakfast. I don't remember eating too much that morning.

But after the planes bombed Wheeler Field, then they came around and strafed the Schofield Barracks area, and we knew then, of course, it was the real thing. When

we went out of the mess hall, we could see the planes, and as they strafed, they were flying very low, and we could see the Japanese markings on them. Of course, some of them I could have hit with a pistol, I mean, just by throwing the pistol. They were that low as they strafed our area.

Marcello: Did any of them strafe close to where you were?

Saunders: Yes, right over our area.

Marcello: Did you come very close to getting hit?

Saunders: Well, I was a few yards away from the strafing, but I was undercover. I could see them strafing--the bullets.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what your reaction was when you saw these Japanese planes coming in.

Saunders: Well, of course, you first . . . hopefully, you've been trained as a soldier to react automatically. The first priority in M Company was to get machine guns on the roof of the buildings and try to knock down some enemy planes. My function was to get back and pick up my weapon--I was armed with a pistol--and to get some ammunition and so on. But we had to get back to our unit and then be guided by our company commander or band commander.

Marcello: Okay, now let's just back up here a minute and reconstruct things as best we can in terms of time. You're heading from the barracks over to the mess hall when

you first hear the noises and the explosions.

Saunders: I think this was about ten minutes before eight o'clock.

Marcello: Okay, now you proceeded over to the mess hall, and you actually . . . well, at least you ordered breakfast; now whether you ate it or not is perhaps a different story.

Saunders: Yes, that's right. I remember getting breakfast-- something real quick--and sitting down to the table, and whether I ate or not, I'm not sure.

Marcello: And was it while you were in here that the Japanese began to strafe the barracks?

Saunders: That's right. That's when they came right to our area; before that, we had seen them at a distance.

Marcello: In the meantime, are you still hearing noises and explosions and so on?

Saunders: Yes.

Marcello: But you're really not paying too much attention to them.

Saunders: I was hungry (chuckle). No, it was like I said to one of these guys. I said, "Well, you know, we may not get anything else to eat today, so I'm going to stuff this down and have a little nourishment, anyway."

Marcello: Were there people looking out the mess hall windows and observing the action and so on?

Saunders: Yes, in fact there were very few people in the mess hall.

And this all happened so fast that I could make a long story out of just a matter of a couple of minutes, really.

Marcello: And did you know that these were Japanese planes while you were in the mess hall, or did you still think it was perhaps some sort of a maneuver or something of that nature yet?

Saunders: Well, as I walked in the mess hall, I didn't know; but I hadn't been in there very many minutes before I knew and then before I was back out again and could see that there were Japanese planes.

Marcello: Okay, so now they strafed the barracks area. About how much time is elapsed at this point now? You mentioned that you did head for cover.

Saunders: Oh, possibly ten minutes. And there was one bomb dropped. I guess it was in the parade ground area just outside of Schofield Barracks, on the outside of the quadrangle. We knew this was the real thing, and I would say ten minutes would be the elapsed time period--no more than that, maybe five or ten minutes.

Marcello: Now by this time, how were people acting? Was it a case of professionalism? Panic? Confusion?

Saunders: Oh, no panic. No, very professional. As I said, the first priority was to get machine guns on the roof;

the company commander, the officers of the company,
and the platoon leaders were functioning.

Marcello: Were they already there when you went over to draw your
pistol?

Saunders: No. Well, they came very shortly from the officers'
quarters. The first sergeant, of course, made sure
things got going the right way, and the supply sergeant
was there to see that the guns were issued--rifles were
issued, machine guns were issued, and ammunition was
issued--and the top priority went to the machine gun,
to get them in action.

Marcello: In the meantime, are planes still flying over and
strafing and so on?

Saunders: Yes. And this lasted for, well, quite a little while.
It's hard now to . . . probably thirty minutes. That
would be my guess.

Marcello: When they issued the arms and ammunition, did you have
to go through the usual service red tape, or was all
that dispensed with on that Sunday morning?

Saunders: For the machine guns it was dispensed with. I drew my
pistol from M Company, but I had to draw my ammunition
from Service Company. So when I was running back to
Service Company, which supplied ammunition to the bands,
really . . . when I was running back to Service Company

is when the planes were coming over and strafing. You could see the bullets. But it was quite a little while before I had the ammunition for my pistol. Although it was exasperating, it wouldn't have done me any good anyway, and I think that the priorities were being met.

Marcello: Did you have an opportunity to perhaps fire at the Japanese planes with your pistol, or had the attack been over by the time you got your ammunition?

Saunders: It was over by the time I got my ammunition, and to hit a fast-moving plane with a pistol was rather impossible, anyway.

Marcello: But did you see people firing at the Japanese planes with rifles and pistols and so on?

Saunders: Yes. As a matter of fact, one of the men in M Company who came back to officers' school with me was officially credited with knocking down one of the planes with a machine gun.

Marcello: Okay, so what did you do personally after you finally got your pistol and the ammunition?

Saunders: Well, then Army routine went on. The band took over interior guard duty just like, as I said, we'd been trained to do, you know. And we had a not quite so formal a guard mount, but it was still the mounting of the guard and the assigning of various posts to patrol

the area,

Marcello: Now as you said, all this took about a half-hour. Am I to assume that most of the action was over at Schofield by this time? There really wasn't a whole lot of bombing at Schofield, right? It was mainly strafing,

Saunders: No, no. It was mainly strafing. To my knowledge, it was this one bomb that landed out there, I think, in the parade ground area. It was the only one that I know of. There may have been others, but I don't know about that. Our main problem was strafing. As far as I know, we didn't have many casualties. I believe I heard somewhere along the line that one man was hit in the leg with a bullet from strafing. As far as I know, that was the only one.

Marcello: In reconstructing this episode, it seems to me that Wheeler Field was the primary target, and there was really no organized attack over Schofield. In other words, planes would drop their bombs and so on over Wheeler and then fly over Schofield as individual planes rather than as part of some sort of a concerted attack as such.

Saunders: Yes. It was probably their plan. They dove down . . . we could see them diving on Wheeler Field, and

then as they pulled out of their dive and dropped their bombs, they were coming right over Schofield Barracks and were just strafing there all the way up to the hospital area.

Marcello: I've heard it said that the planes were flying so low that in some cases one could actually distinguish the pilots.

Saunders: That's right. That's right. A couple of planes I saw, like I said, I think I could have hit them with my pistol just by throwing the pistol--they were that low.

Marcello: Were you able to observe any of the actions of these Japanese pilots and so on? Or could you describe what they looked like or anything of that nature? Were they that close and that low?

Saunders: Well, they were that close and that low. Of course, the planes had a hooded cover over the cockpit area, so you couldn't distinguish the person sitting in there. You could see a person sitting in there, but they were wearing goggles and, as I recall, at least flying helmets of some kind that didn't allow too much of the face to be exposed.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that these planes were coming over relatively low. At what rate of speed were they coming

over?

Saunders: Well, pretty fast. I don't know how fast by today's standards . . . not so fast, I guess, but they were coming out of a dive, so, you know, they were going possibly 200 miles an hour. I'm just wildly guessing, because now we fly so much at 500 or 600 miles an hour that it's hard to tell.

Marcello: But for the speed of airplanes at that time, they were coming in rather fast.

Saunders: They certainly were. As I say, they were pulling out of their dive and had considerable speed up.

Marcello: Where were you assigned to guard duty?

Saunders: This is strange. As I said, our guard mount was still pretty much formal, although it was not quite as formal under these circumstances as usual. But every guard mount had one private assigned to the regimental commander, and I was the guy assigned to the regimental commander from the band--as his orderly or whatever the title was.

So I immediately took off to the regimental commander's office--Colonel Morrissey. And, of course, he was really not in the mood to have some private from the band reporting in to him at the moment. But I did report in to him and was told to wait in the outer office, and . . .

Marcello: Stay out of the way, in other words.

Saunders: . . . stay out of the way, and that was probably the best thing I could do at the moment. I'd be called when I was needed.

Well, in a very few minutes--relatively few minutes--the colonel and his staff took off along with the other elements of the regiment out to their beach positions on the field, and I was sort of left there. No one had told me to leave, so I maintained my post. But my post was right there in the regimental commander's office, so after an hour . . . well, let's say . . . I don't know the timing, but after thirty minutes or so, the colonel and his staff left to go out into the field to their beach positions.

In another few minutes, ten or fifteen minutes, Colonel Bush, who was the F-4 supply officer, came by and asked what I was doing in there, and I told him my plight. And he said, "Well, you report back to your unit." He said, "Wait a minute! The whole thing has been changed!" He said, "Your unit has gone to the deep well," which was the water supply for Schofield Barracks, "to do guard duty there, and the service company has taken over interior guard." And he said, "So you're here sort of like a man without a country

at the moment." He said, "I don't know how to get you back to your unit right now." And he said, "Can you type?" And I said, "Yes, sir." So I wound up with a job in with him and became regimental . . . I was transferred immediately into Service Company as regimental ammunition clerk. So it's a very strange story, and I kept that job for a little while and then was transferred to the personnel office and then in April came back to attend officers' school.

Marcello: What sort of damage was done at Schofield Barracks as a result of all the strafing? Did you get a chance to observe it?

Saunders: Oh, yes. Very little. Little or no damage, really. Oh, a few bullet holes in the buildings, a few broken windows. But essentially there was very little damage.

Marcello: Did you get a chance to see any of the other bases and the damage that had occurred at them.

Saunders: Yes. As ammunition clerk, I had to take ammunition reports down to a special ammunition depot, which was one of the most hazardous duties in the whole war as far as I was concerned, because everyone was edgy, and it all had to be done at night in the blackout. But later on I had an opportunity to go down to Pearl Harbor and see the damage there within a few days on some particular assign-

ment.

Marcello: What did it look like? Can you describe it?

Saunders: Yes, one big mess. It was unbelievable, really. I had seen it so many times in driving by and seeing the ships all lined up so beautifully in their particular berths, and this was just a big mess.

Marcello: I guess it was quite a contrast from what it had been before December 7, 1941.

Saunders: It was, indeed. And they smoldered and burned for a long time. You could see smoke coming up from the Pearl Harbor area even as far away as Schofield Barracks.

Marcello: What sort of feelings or emotions did you experience when you saw all this damage and so on?

Saunders: Well, it was, I guess, an awful letdown feeling. You knew that they had inflicted a tremendous amount of damage; we knew that they had knocked out the Air Force for all practical purposes and had essentially knocked out the Navy to a very great extent. And the reaction for a few days after Pearl Harbor was, "Well, we're just waiting for them to come, to make a landing," and we fully expected it. I don't know yet why they didn't do it.

Marcello: I'm sure there all sorts of rumors running rampant during the aftermath of the attack.

Saunders: Oh, yes. All kinds.

Marcello: And I guess the one about the coming invasion was perhaps the most prevalent rumor.

Saunders: Well, it seemed logical. It seemed logical. In infantry training you gained your objective by taking ground. And the only thing we could understand, or believe, that would happen would be that they would invade, and we couldn't last too long, I mean, against big force.

Marcello: Did you, in fact, hear that they already had landed? Had this rumor ever been going around?

Saunders: It may have. I don't particularly recall, though. There were incidents of small units maybe landing here or there, especially in connection, I think, with the big Japanese fishing fleet that were berthed on the other side of Diamond Head. But there had been a lot of Japanese soldiers infiltrated into that fishing fleet, and they . . . but never anything that was verified to the point where you could believe it.

Marcello: I'm sure there were quite a few trigger-happy servicemen around during that night of December 7th.

Saunders: Yes.

Marcello: And then on the proceeding nights.

Saunders: Absolutely. Like I say, taking ammunition reports down there, of course, we . . . the main ammunition dump on

the island was heavily guarded, as you can well imagine. Passwords were very important, and I think this is true of any battle situation at night when you can't see somebody or you're a little trigger-happy and your going to shoot first and ask questions later. This was true in Europe later.

Marcello: Could you hear sporadic gunfire that night?

Saunders: Oh, yes, for several nights. And you never knew quite what it was, and these were the things, I think, that prompted some of the rumors of an invasion, and yet they'd be so sporadic that you knew it couldn't be anything very big.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Saunders, that kind of exhausts my questions. Is there anything else relative to the attack that you think we haven't covered and need to cover as part of the record?

Saunders: No. Well, wait, there's one thing that has always sort of stuck with me. There were tremendous investigations and reports and rumors later about how the Japanese happened to infiltrate the network of planes and ships that we had patrolling the area, and all sorts of stories confirmed or unconfirmed about negligence and so on and so forth. I don't know that any of them were true at all. I think that in some instances we were out there

pretty much on our own. It was certainly a sneak attack, and as I saw the movie . . .

Marcello: Tora! Tora! Tora!

Saunders: . . . Tora! Tora! Tora! and the explanation they had of the way they were able to infiltrate the network, there's still a sort of a big question in my mind as to what actually, if anything, had broken down to allow this sort of penetration. But that was above and beyond my call of duty at the time, and I guess it may never be answered.

Marcello: I have one last question, Mr. Saunders. Why do you, thirty-six years later, belong to the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association?

Saunders: Well, I don't know. I'm not particularly a joiner. I travel extensively; I seldom have a chance to make meetings. I'm active in the church and try to make meetings there, but I guess that . . . oh, I guess I'm proud of the fact that I was there, and I guess possibly one of the reasons might be that regardless of the situation, we still have to maintain an alert because a sneak attack could come up as the Pearl Harbor attack did and catch us unprepared. So the idea of staying alert is important anytime--now or any other time. I suppose the other reason might be that I was a witness to an historical

event, and that's quite a new adventure.

Marcello: Mr. Saunders, I want to thank you very much for having taken time to talk with me. You said a lot of very interesting and important things, and I'm sure that scholars are going to find your comments most valuable when they use them to write about Pearl Harbor.

Saunders: Well, thank you. I appreciate the opportunity.