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Interview with  
THOMAS S. PRENTICE  
May 31, 1979

Place of Interview: Richardson, Texas

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: Thomas S. Prentice  
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Thomas Prentice

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Richardson, Texas

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Thomas Prentice for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 31, 1979, in Richardson, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Prentice in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was in the United States Army and stationed at Fort Kamehameha during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor and the surrounding military installations on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Prentice, 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. Prentice: Well, I was born in Fremont, Ohio, in August, 1917. I went to college at Bowling Green State University and Tiffin University, and I took some more courses at Evansville College.

Dr. Marcello: Now, did you do this before you went in the service, or

did you do this after you were in the service?

Prentice: Well, I did two-thirds of it before I went in the service. Then I went to work for the Sun Oil Company about a year-and-a-half before the war started. Then I got drafted and sent to Camp Callin, California, in the antiaircraft artillery. It's right near San Diego.

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

Prentice: Not nearly as closely as I do today or not nearly as closely as young people do today. At least to use my own children as an example.

Marcello: Is there any particular reason why you waited for the draft rather than, let's say, getting in one of the other branches of the service?

Prentice: I'm kind of a gambler, I guess. Just let the chips fall, is my attitude.

Marcello: Now, how long was basic training at Camp Callin at that time?

Prentice: Three months.

Marcello: When did you say that you went in the service?

Prentice: I didn't say, I don't think. It was June 11, 1941.

Marcello: When you thought about the country getting into war, is it safe to say that your eyes were turned more toward Europe than toward the Far East? In other words, when you went through boot camp, did you hear any of your sergeants or

anything of that nature talk about the possibility of war with Japan?

Prentice: Let me say this. When I was at Camp Callin, the draft extension occurred from a year to two-and-a-half years, or to the duration or whatever the end of the existing crisis was, and we figured at that time that we had had it. That was about the time that a lot of the guys from the National Guard that had been in Mississippi put OHIO ("Over the Hill in October") all over the place, because their year was up and they had just been extended to two-and-a-half years. So, we figured that we were in the service for a good, long time. It was a depressing thought, to say the least.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what that did for your morale, that is, when you heard that instead of being in for a year, you were going to be in for the duration.

Prentice: It wasn't good for our morale at all.

Marcello: Did you detect a certain urgency in your basic training while you were there at Camp Callin?

Prentice: As far as war was concerned, not really. We just kind of had . . . we made the best of a bad deal and had fun where we could have fun and got kicks out of things and never let our sense of humor completely go to hell. It was sort of fun. The first couple of years, I guess, was kind of interesting in the service, but after that I got awful tired

of it.

Marcello: How long did you actually stay in altogether?

Prentice: Well, nearly five years,

Marcello: Okay, where did you go after you got out of boot camp?

Prentice: I went up to Angel Island and then across to Honolulu.

Marcello: Was there any particular reason why you were sent to Honolulu, or was it simply because they needed men there?

Prentice: They needed men there. It was just the luck of the draw, as far as I was concerned. I was glad to go over there. I really was.

Marcello: I assume you were kind of looking forward to going to Honolulu.

Prentice: Yes, I was.

Marcello: Did you have visions of a tropical paradise and all that sort of thing?

Prentice: Well, yes, and it is (chuckle).

Marcello: Now, did you go directly to Fort Kamehameha after you arrived in the Hawaiian Islands?

Prentice: Well, yes. We might have been someplace else for a day or two, but we went pretty directly to Fort Kamehameha. As a matter of fact, I think it was the same day that we went to Fort Kamehameha, and we got assigned . . . or I got assigned . . . well, I was with several of my friends from Camp Callin who got assigned to the Headquarters Company,

97th Coast Artillery.

Marcello: You were in the Headquarters Company, 97th Coast Artillery?

Prentice: We called it Headquarters Battery. I said "Company," but it's Headquarters Battery, 97th Coast Artillery.

Marcello: What was your particular function in Headquarters Battery?

Prentice: Well, I did some clerking for it. At Camp Callin I had done some company clerk's work, so I was doing some of that. Of course, we all had guns and rifles and that kind of thing. We had to go out and do some actual practice with the guns--with the 3-inch guns--that we had within our battery. They didn't do any good at all during the attack at Pearl Harbor, because they were located in different parts of the island.

Marcello: Well, I gather that with the college education that you had that you were an exception rather than the rule in your particular outfit. I would assume that not too many people had very much of a college education.

Prentice: There were, it seemed like, a higher percentage in that bunch than the average. These were all draftees; they weren't regular Army people. I wouldn't say it was a very high percentage like it is today, but it was probably, I would say, 25 per cent that had some college . . . 25 to 30 per cent.

Marcello: Describe what Fort Kamehameha looked like from a physical standpoint.

Prentice: Well, it was really one long street with barracks, officers'

homes, and non-commissioned officers' quarters in various parts. It was a pretty long street and was adjacent to Hickam Field. As a matter of fact, I think at the gateway you had your choice of going to Hickam or going to Fort Kamehameha.

Marcello: Well, if you were that close to Hickam Field, then you were not too far from the Pearl Harbor Navy Base, either.

Prentice: Well, we were what they called one of the harbor defense forts of Pearl Harbor. Fort Kamehameha was on one side, and Fort Weaver was on the other side of the channel that went into Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Approximately how many people would you say were assigned to Kamehameha? You'd have to estimate that, of course.

Prentice: I would say not more than 8,000 or 10,000. It wasn't a big base.

Marcello: And you said that your particular battery had 3-inch guns?

Prentice: Well, yes. Our battalion had 3-inch guns.

Marcello: How many of the 3-inch guns would the battalion have?

Prentice: I think each company had four. I'm really kind of fuzzy, but I think there were four platoons to a battery, and I think each platoon had a set of antiaircraft guns. We weren't really there long enough to get organized. We got there in September, and we really hadn't done a whole heck of a lot as far as learning anything. We learned a little bit at



Camp Callin about 3-inch guns and about rifles. We had the Springfield and the M-1. We also had the Browning Automatic Rifle. Basically, that's all we had. We got the M-1's, I think, when we were at Fort Kamehameha.

Marcello: What sort of work did you do as a clerk there in the Headquarters Battery?

Prentice: Well, a lot of things like morning reports, duty rosters, keep the service records up, and that type of thing. Actually, they had a bigger office . . . you didn't really work in that company headquarters. You went down to an office down the street, and every company had two or three little desks in there where we would work. Of course, once the war started, that was the end of just about all of that. Everybody was on some kind of duty assignment.

Marcello: Now, did you undergo any further military training, as such, after you got to Fort Kamehameha in September, 1941?

Prentice: Military training?

Marcello: Okay, you went through boot camp and so on there at Camp Callin. Then did you undergo any advanced training, so to speak, after you got to Fort Kamehameha?

Prentice: Before December 7th, I would say, very little. We were on an alert a week before Pearl Harbor, and the alert was called off, as a matter of fact. I mean, we were just kind of enlisted men. We were really just joking and making wisecracks

and kind of bitching about the alert, because it kept us all at our station there. One time, we were joking about it, and I guess I made a wisecrack going by an officer's tent, and he came out, and he really read the riot act to us and told us how important it was and how serious it was. I still didn't believe it, and that was two nights before the Japs attacked.

Marcello: During that period prior to the war, how would you describe the morale of the troops there at Fort Kamehameha? Was it a happy post? Was everybody seeming to make the best of the situation?

Prentice: I think it was fairly happy; I mean, we had our duties during the week, and then we went down to Waikiki Beach on Saturday. We had a lot of freedom. We took tours of the island and that type of thing that was furnished by the Army. I think it was pretty happy. Besides that, we just heard the rumor . . . I guess it was a Saturday that we were down at Waikiki after the alert was called off, before December 7th. We heard a rumor that day that they were going to send all draftees back to the States and replace them with regular Army personnel, and, of course, everybody thought that was a great idea. Of course, it was somebody's dream.

Marcello: How did the liberty routine work there at Fort Kamehameha? For example, could you get liberty during the week?

Prentice: You could, I guess, get a pass during the week, but only a few people at a time could get a pass during the week. I don't think there was too much or too many restrictions on a weekend,

Marcello: So normally, then, you could get off the post on the weekend just about whenever you wanted or if you didn't have the duty.

Prentice: Yes, that's right. If you didn't have some kind of a duty, why, you could get off the post almost every weekend.

Marcello: Was it fairly easy to get a weekend pass, let us say, a seventy-two-hour pass, which is what I guess they were called?

Prentice: Well, I never tried to get one or never had one before December 7th. I can remember having one after it. It was quite awhile after that, and a few of us guys went downtown just to drink and go to the movies and that kind of stuff. I think there was pretty much freedom there for the GI's,

Marcello: I would assume that you probably didn't have too much money to spend even when you did have liberty, did you?

Prentice: Oh, no, we didn't have very much money. When we got into the service, we were making \$21 a day once a month (chuckle). Then when we went to Fort "Kam," I guess we got raised to \$30. Then, I guess, some people made PFC and corporal and that kind of thing, because they had to staff the company, and so that gave me a . . . I got a PFC rating, and I got

\$6 or something like that more a month. That was before they ever gave any kind of money to the service people, So there wasn't any money, no.

Marcello: Even if you did have money, I guess there weren't too many hotels or so on where you could stay in Honolulu, were there?

Prentice: Well, no, there weren't. At that time, there was the Royal Hawaiian that was taken over by the Army.

Marcello: But that occurred, of course, after the war started, did it not?

Prentice: No, that was taken over before the war started, I'm sure, because we used to go to dances down there and that type of thing. It was a U.S.O. type of thing. Then there was a big hotel . . . we were over there about three or four years ago. My wife and I went over. I never can remember the name of that big hotel where we stayed. Maybe it was the Moana. Anyway, that may have been about the only hotel, and I don't even know whether that may have been taken over, too.

Marcello: I've heard a lot of the Army personnel say that they many times would avoid going into Honolulu on the weekends, because the place was overrun by Navy personnel when they first came in.

Prentice: That's right. At times it was overrun by Navy personnel.

Marcello: I guess downtown Honolulu was wall-to-wall bodies on the .

weekend, was it not?

Prentice: It really was. There were a lot of servicemen. Of course, before the war . . . I can't even remember . . . I know we didn't have to wear our uniforms in San Diego all the time, but I can't remember if before the war we could wear our civilian clothes or not in Kamehameha. It seems to me like we could wear civilian clothes.

Marcello: Did the liberty routine change any as one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate? Could you detect any change in your liberty routine?

Prentice: Well, the only thing was that we didn't have any liberty that week.

Marcello: Was that because of the alert?

Prentice: Yes, because of the alert. But that was the only time I really felt there were any restrictions,

Marcello: Now, let's talk a little bit about this alert. You mentioned that it began a week before December 7th or approximately the week before December 7th. Describe what took place during this alert. How did it affect you personally?

Prentice: I suppose the only way it affected me personally was that you were restricted. You had certain jobs that you had to do, and there wasn't any time for fooling around at all on your own. You had to be where you were supposed to be.

Marcello: And in your particular case, where were you supposed to be?

Prentice: Well, I wish I could remember. I was, like I said, doing that company clerk's work, and I really can't remember what we had to do.

Marcello: Did you have a place or a location in the field, so to speak, where you would be going, or did you stay there at Fort "Kam" during the alert?

Prentice: I stayed there at Fort "Kam."

Marcello: How about the firing batteries? Did they have various positions outside the fort where they set up the guns and so on?

Prentice: Well, they probably did; they probably did. But I don't know that for a fact.

Marcello: I assume, then, that you really had nothing at all to do with the guns.

Prentice: No, not really.

Marcello: Did your routine change any during this alert? In other words, did the type of work that you did change any?

Prentice: You know, I really can't remember much about that alert. All I can remember is that officer reading me off for taking it so lightly and bitching about it and that we were doing something apparently that we didn't like to do; but as far as what we actually did, I really can't tell you. Maybe it was this "hurry-up-and-wait" type of thing that the Army's

so good at, you know,

Marcello: Did you detect that the base was becoming more security-conscious or anything like that as one gets closer and closer to December 7th? In other words, were the number of guards increased or anything of that nature?

Prentice: I don't really think so. I didn't detect any more security, Really, I didn't. I don't think there was any more security than there was before.

Marcello: When you thought of the typical Japanese, during that pre-Pearl Harbor period, what sort of an individual did you usually conjure up in your own mind? Did you have a stereotype of a typical Japanese, perhaps?

Prentice: Well, really, of course, there were a lot of Japanese on the island over there, and, really, I had no feeling one way or the other about the Japanese. I felt like I didn't dislike them, and I didn't particularly like them. I didn't know them. I'm sure if I would have known some of them, well, I probably would have liked them. I think some of those Japanese-American surgeons over there saved an awful lot of lives after Pearl Harbor. I think they were good Americans for the most part. Like, Hawaii was the melting pot of lots of nationalities, and you just got along over there.

Marcello: Did you have very many Japanese-Americans working on the base? Or at that time was it fairly difficult for you to

tell one particular nationality from another?

Prentice: Well, it was rather difficult. There were a lot of Orientals working on the base. There were a lot of Orientals working everywhere.

Marcello: When you and your buddies got around and talked in your bull sessions, did the possibility of a Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor ever come up? Did you ever think that something like this could possibly happen as relations between the two countries worsened?

Prentice: I had my head in the sand on that. I really never thought that that was a possibility. I mean, I guess I had read a couple of books about that, but I just never thought that that was a possibility, because I thought it was really so far out. It was really a far-out idea, although the war in Europe was certainly a reality. I just never really thought that that was worthy of serious consideration.

Marcello: I would assume that distance alone might have influenced this type of thinking on your part. In other words, the Hawaiian Islands are a pretty long way from Japan.

Prentice: Absolutely! Absolutely! They are much farther from Japan than they are from the United States--maybe about three times as far--so I didn't really think that there was that possibility.

Marcello: Was it more or less a relief, so far as you and your buddies



were concerned, when that alert was called off?

Prentice: Oh, yes, it definitely was a relief, because we wanted to go into Honolulu.

Marcello: And when was that alert called off?

Prentice: It was Friday night.

Marcello: It was called off on Friday night?

Prentice: Yes.

Marcello: And when did you then subsequently have liberty?

Prentice: Saturday.

Marcello: Did you . . . well, let's describe that Saturday of December 6, 1941. You mentioned that you had liberty. Do you recall when you went into Honolulu?

Prentice: Oh, no, I really don't.

Marcello: Was it morning or afternoon or evening?

Prentice: It probably was morning. It was probably maybe about ten o'clock that we went in there, and we always went to the Royal Hawaiian, and sometimes we went to the show at the Waikiki Theatre right across the street. We'd go swimming all the time, and we had a lot of fun drinking a little bit of beer.

Marcello: Do you recall exactly what you did on that Saturday before the attack?

Prentice: I really can't distinguish that from any other Saturday, except, like I said, we were talking about . . . the only

thing precise that I can think about or that I can remember is that we were talking about this rumor that they would replace the draftees with regular Army people, and we were all going back to the States. Of course, that was a great idea. That's what we wanted to do.

Marcello: Now, you had been in the Hawaiian Islands from September up until December at this point. Were you having a good time? Did you like it there?

Prentice: Well, yes. It's a great spot. I liked it there. Being in the Army is enough of a restriction to spoil your enjoyment of something. I mean, it was the "Paradise of the Pacific," but it really wasn't for the servicemen.

Marcello: I've heard it said that after awhile those islands become a little bit confining. They are small, and it doesn't take too long to see everything that there is to see there.

Prentice: Well, that's true.

Marcello: Now, you mentioned that you were in Honolulu that Saturday of December 6, 1941. Do you recall approximately what time you came back to Fort Kamehameha that evening?

Prentice: It was probably sometime about, I'd say, six or seven o'clock.

Marcello: So you came back relatively early then.

Prentice: Right.

Marcello: Did you have any plans for when you got back on the base again? In other words, were there any activities there at

Fort "Kam" that you planned to engage in?

Prentice: No, We might have been required to come back. I can't really remember. We went to the show a lot there.

Marcello: They had a movie right there in Fort "Kam?"

Prentice: Yes. We'd write letters and sit around and shoot the bull. There really wasn't anything that was . . . all the days kind of ran together.

Marcello: Were things pretty quiet back at Fort Kamehameha that evening of Saturday, December 6th?

Prentice: Yes, because all the officers were gone. I guess most of the people were gone. Most of the enlisted men were gone.

Marcello: Now, on a weekend, and let us take that weekend of December 6th, was there normally a great deal of drinking and carousing and so on that went on, or was this sort of activity the exception rather than the rule on a weekend?

Prentice: Well, a lot of drinking went on. I think the big drinking, though, was probably among the officers when they were having parties and all that kind of stuff. Of course, there were a couple of places at Fort "Kam" there where you could get beer, and some people got a little rowdy at those things. When you see something like that happen, our guys got the hell out of there, because we didn't want to get mixed up with something like that. But there really wasn't a whole lot of activity at Fort "Kam."

Marcello: In other words, most of the men would have been in fairly good shape and condition to fight on a Sunday morning,

Prentice: Well, I would say so, yes.

Marcello: Okay, I think this brings us into that Sunday morning of December 7, 1941, and what I want you to do at this point is to go into as much detail as you can remember from the time you woke up until all hell broke loose. Let me ask you this, first of all. On a Sunday morning, could you stay in the sack as long as you wanted to if you didn't have the duty? In other words, if it wasn't a holiday routine?

Prentice: Generally, yes. As a matter of fact, that's where most of us were--in the sack--when we heard all the explosions.

Marcello: Okay, pick up the story from that point. You're in bed on a Sunday morning; you hear explosions.

Prentice: Yes, we heard the explosions, and I don't know whether I made the comment or somebody else did: "There's the Navy doing some practicing, and they're getting awful close if they are!" Then they got louder and louder, and so we all got some pants on and went out to . . . our barracks were sort of a quadrangle, and we went out in that quadrangle area there, an open area. Just about the time we got out there, we looked up and we could see this Japanese plane with that big sun on the side of it.

Marcello: How low was this plane flying?

Prentice: It was really low. You could see that there was a gunner in there, and then there was a pilot in there. Boy, I tell you, that was hard to face. That was something that really shocked the hell out of everybody.

Marcello: Now, did this plane come directly over the quadrangle?

Prentice: More or less, it basically did. Maybe between ours and the next one. It was right up there. We could see it, and then we could see all the smoke coming from Hickam Field, and we just ran out there and . . . of course, in the meantime, why, a couple of guys got rifles and bullets and started shooting at them. I can remember the sergeant coming out and saying, "Hold your fire! Hold your fire! You can't hit anything with that thing! All you'll do is draw their fire!" So there wasn't any firing as far as we were concerned, because we didn't have any machine guns that were set up or anything. Of course, every company, even your headquarters company, has machine guns and that kind of thing to protect yourself.

I can remember this one guy that was walking out the barracks toward a latrine there. He had to go out the door. We heard this splintering sound, and I don't know how that bullet missed him, because it came through the ceiling and went down through the floor right where he was standing. But it missed him completely.

We were told then to go into the supply room and get as much stuff as we could get out of that supply room. By the time we were over there, I think it was one of our own antiaircraft shells that came down and exploded in a room right close to us. Anyhow, I never hit the floor so fast in my life as I did that time. See, what they were doing, some people were shooting these uncut 3-inch or whatever antiaircraft shells at these airplanes. The fuses at that time had to be cut in order for them to explode. If they weren't cut, they just went up there and came back down and exploded on impact. And that's what we figured had hit our barracks.

Marcello: Okay, let's back up here and take these things in a logical order. You mentioned that you hear the explosions when you were still in the sack, and you rushed out into the quadrangle after having dressed. You saw this initial Japanese plane. About how high off the ground was this first plane?

Prentice: Well, I would say a couple hundred feet. We watched them. They'd go over the hangars at Hickam Field, and they were so low. I mean, we were just a couple of hundred yards or maybe a little more than that from these hangars.

Marcello: Could you distinguish the crew in that initial plane that you saw?

Prentice: Yes. We could see two men up there. One man was holding a machine gun, and he was firing over there in that direction, and there was the pilot. But then when they went over Hickam Field, it just looked like they banked and parked and dropped their bombs and then took off again. Of course, they didn't do that, but they were going that slow, and they were just that low.

Marcello: So they were not coming in, then, at a high rate of speed, They were more or less gliding in, you might say.

Prentice: They didn't look fast to me. I'm sure that the ones over at Pearl Harbor were coming in at a high rate of speed, They were dropping torpedoes, and they have to be coming fast, but ours weren't, and the ones that came over Hickam Field weren't. I'm sure that maybe there were some high planes over there, too, but the ones that really did the damage were those low planes, because they couldn't miss.

Marcello: Okay, so you see this initial plane. Now, what is your reaction? In other words, do you stand around watching that plane, or do you immediately react?

Prentice: Well, for a while you stand around and watch it, and then you go and look at Hickam Field and see all the smoke, and then you're hoping you have some leadership around there, which there wasn't. There wasn't any leadership at all.

Marcello: Nobody is giving any orders.

Prentice: Finally, this one sergeant says, "Hold your fire!" He had some people do this, and he had some of them digging trenches out in the quadrangle and everywhere.

Marcello: About how long would you have been watching that first plane before you personally reacted and did something halfway useful?

Prentice: There was hardly anything useful done that whole damn day. I suppose it was four or five minutes before I really . . . the realization of what was happening was such a shock that I think everybody in that whole company aged about ten years right there on the spot, because you just couldn't believe what you were seeing.

Marcello: Okay, what was your next move after you did observe the plane for however long you watched it?

Prentice: We got dressed, and I can't remember whether some of the non-coms had us do various things. But we certainly got dressed. I know we went over and started getting those supplies out of there. It was ammunition and belts and that type of thing, and we were bringing it out. That's when that unexploded antiaircraft shell hit.

Marcello: Now, was this small arms ammunition that you were bringing up?

Prentice: Yes, it was small arms ammunition.

Marcello: And were you helping distribute it, or in your particular case were you simply going over to get some?



Prentice: I was trying to pass it out to people, but then we weren't going to fire, because all we had was those old Army rifles, 1903 Springfields, and we had some Browning Automatic Rifles in there. But it wasn't until after Pearl Harbor that we started into practice with them.

Marcello: Just out of curiosity, did you have to go through the usual Army red tape in order to draw guns and ammunition at that time, or was it simply being passed out as rapidly as people could handle it?

Prentice: Well, whatever we had we were passing out, but then it was so unorganized and nobody knew what the hell they were doing, anyway. I don't think there was any . . . it was just something to do, really, because there wasn't anything accomplished.

Marcello: Were there very many planes that actually came over Fort "Kam?"

Prentice: No. There were, I suppose, maybe a half a dozen or so that I was aware of. I mean, there might have been more than that, but I know there were a hell of a lot more of them than that over there at Hickam Field.

Marcello: I assume that Fort "Kam" really wasn't coming under any direct attack itself.

Prentice: No. Anything that happened at Fort "Kam" probably was a fringe benefit (chuckle).

Marcello: What did you observe over at Hickam Field? What sort of action did you see taking place over there?

Prentice: Just that the bombers or the airplanes dropping their bombs, and then, of course, you could hear the rat-a-tat-tat of the machine guns, and I thought sure that those were Japanese machine guns that were going that way. We couldn't see really any activity from where we were, as far as the Americans were concerned. I don't think there was anything that got off at Hickam Field. I don't think a plane got off the ground at Hickam Field. I think they were all destroyed.

Marcello: Did you have a very good view of Pearl Harbor from where you were?

Prentice: No. All we could see was the smoke. We didn't see all of the destruction over there until maybe two or three weeks afterwards.

Marcello: Okay, now you mentioned that you were over in the supply shack handing out the small arms and ammunition when that American antiaircraft shell exploded. Again, describe that particular incident in whatever detail you can remember.

Prentice: We were carrying this great, big box, is what we were doing, because that had maybe ammunition belts or something, and it was heavy. There was three or four of us carrying it, and we heard this crash, and then we dropped that. Then, of course, there was the explosion, and I don't think anybody ever hit the floor any faster than we did. Then, of course, it hadn't hurt anybody, but there was some pieces of it that

people found laying around. We were really pretty lucky as far as that's concerned, because I'd hate like hell to get killed by a mistake, you know.

Marcello: In a situation like this, I assume that you really had no pre-assigned position to which you were to go, other than perhaps to battery headquarters.

Prentice: No, there really wasn't anything planned, and, of course, the battle positions for our battalion were in various parts of the island. There wasn't any way for anybody to get over there. By the time they got over there, the damage was already done and the Japs had already left. There weren't any officers there. One lieutenant came around maybe, I suppose, by nine or ten o'clock, but the rest of the officers didn't get there until late.

Marcello: How long were you over there in the supply shack?

Prentice: Oh, I suppose, fifteen or twenty minutes was all--not very long. Then they had us out there digging ditches, digging trenches; and it was all sand, and you couldn't hardly dig a trench in the sand because it would collapse on you.

Marcello: Where were you digging these trenches? Down by the beach?

Prentice: No, out in the area in the quadrangle area--the open area there. I never did see the reason for that, either. It was just something else to do, I think, because they just didn't know what to do.

Marcello: And how long did you continue at that task there digging this trench?

Prentice: Oh, I suppose we were doing that for an hour or so, Of course, everybody was thinking about . . . the first wave was over . . . I don't know . . . maybe it was nine o'clock or something like that, and then, of course, they were still coming in over Pearl Harbor. We could see the shiny planes over at Pearl Harbor. They were high planes. We could see them dropping their bombs over Pearl Harbor because of the sunlight and the way they would reflect.

Marcello: In the meantime, what were your antiaircraft guns doing at Fort "Kam?"

Prentice: Well, like I say, our antiaircraft guns were at different positions on the island, and there was no organization, no way that those people were going to get out there.

Marcello: In other words, the men were at Fort "Kam," but the guns were at another place.

Prentice: Right. Of course, "Fort "Kam" had a lot of what they called batteries there, but there really wasn't anything, I don't think, too useful against airplanes. They had big mortars in some of these batteries, and they were for sea attack. I really don't know if they were too useful for that, because I think they were probably used by Napoleon there.

Marcello: They were that old (chuckle)?

Prentice: Yes,

Marcello: Okay, this takes us up to sometime around midmorning or maybe a little bit after midmorning. What did you do the rest of the day?

Prentice: Well, we were really listening to the radio and waiting for the next wave, and maybe by that time we had some kind of leadership there. It wasn't what you could call good leadership, because it was just that the officers were there, they didn't know anymore about what to do than we had done before.

Marcello: Were there any types of activities that you were personally doing from about midmorning on, that is, after you finished digging the trenches and handing out the ammunition and so on and so forth? What were you personally doing the rest of the day?

Prentice: It seems to me like we just hung around those trenches and waited for another wave.

Marcello: What did you talk about? Do you recall? What sort of conversation went on?

Prentice: I'm sure that most of our conversation was about "I can't believe this," you know. "I just can't believe it," you know. "We'll never get out of this mess." I think that everybody felt the same way. It was awful. Of course, you talked about the rumors that you heard about all the battleships that are

down, and then somebody would say that there was a plane shot down down the street. We talked about going down and looking at that or something.

Marcello: Was there ever any talk about an uprising by the local Japanese population or anything of that nature? Did that rumor ever circulate?

Prentice: I never really heard that. I'm sure the Japanese had spies over there, but I think the local population were good American people.

Marcello: But you probably didn't know that at the time, though.

Prentice: No. There was some, I think, speculation about the Japanese population there.

Marcello: How about an invasion? Were you expecting the Japanese to land?

Prentice: That's what we were waiting for. And if they would've come in, they would've had us. They would've had the island, because nobody knew what in the hell they were doing.

Marcello: What sort of armament did you personally have at this point?

Prentice: Well, I think I just had whatever we had, whether it was M-1's or Springfields. I can't remember that.

Marcello: Did you have plenty of ammunition?

Prentice: Well, I don't even think we had plenty of ammunition. I think ammunition was pretty scarce.

Marcello: What took place that evening?

Prentice: Well, of course, then they started moving all the civilians--all

the wives of the officers and enlisted men. They moved them into these batteries. They were pretty big places. They were kind of safe from bombing. Some of the . . . I don't know how many . . . maybe a platoon was assigned to each one of these batteries. I never will forget that. They gave us hand grenades. We had this ammunition belt on, full of hand grenades, and we carried them around for about two or three weeks. We had our rifles.

Marcello: What did you personally do that evening?

Prentice: Well, we just went into this Battery Hasbrook, is what that was called--Battery Hasbrook. That's what we did, and we were there, I guess, ostensibly to protect the civilians that were in there.

Marcello: And where was it located?

Prentice: Well, it was right down the street from Fort Kamehameha . . . from where we were. It was a long street, and they had what they call batteries. Every time there was an alert, of course, the sirens would blow, and we'd have to go into that hole there, and we'd then come back out again. There was a lot of hysterical, you might say, people. The women particularly were hysterical. The siren was blowing, of course, and they would come on about this submarine that was found around there real close, and they thought that was maybe the beginning of an invasion. That was the thing that everybody was

looking for--an invasion. Another wave of air raids and an invasion was really what they were looking for, and we were absolutely not prepared for anything.

Marcello: Describe what this Battery Hasbrook was like. How large an area was it? What was located there?

Prentice: Well, I had a feeling I was in a cave. It had big doors on it. It was probably as big as this house--I don't know--when you went in there. There were these mortars, big mortars, that were sitting around in there that were permanent installations.

Marcello: Were they being manned?

Prentice: No, I mean, like I say, I think Napoleon used those things. I don't think they were useful.

Marcello: And they were not even in the process of being manned at that time that you were there.

Prentice: No,

Marcello: And where were the civilians located?

Prentice: In that same area. They were sitting on one side or on the other side, and they were, of course, standing around. You had to sit on the floor, basically. But that's where we spent, like, I suppose, three or four or five days.

After that, I can remember, I was assigned to the guardhouse, and I used to have to go out with another soldier and guard the prisoners. That went on for, I suppose, a



couple of months.

Marcello: We'll get to this point in a minute. During that night of December 7th, were a lot of trigger-happy servicemen around? Could you hear occasional gunshots all night?

Prentice: Oh, yes. There were gunshots all the time. There was this one colonel that was always coming in, and this was in the few days and night after Pearl Harbor. He was always coming, and he'd say . . . he'd come into that battery or whatever it was, and he'd always say, "Hold your fire, men! Hold your fire, men! Colonel Griffin's coming here! Hold your fire, men!" He was so damn afraid one of the soldiers would shoot him.

Marcello: I guess it wasn't too safe to walk around at night.

Prentice: No, it wasn't. Then, of course, they had these mongooses, and they were always making noise, and they attracted a lot of shots, too. It was really just a turmoil. From the Japanese point of view, they really messed up, because they could've gone in there and taken us, I think.

Marcello: Now, in the days and nights following the attack, did you stay right there at Battery Hasbrook? In other words, did you sleep there, or did you go back to the barracks?

Prentice: Well, we stayed there for, I'd say, about a week, and then I think we went back to the barracks; and then we got on another kind of duty, and we didn't go back there anymore,

because apparently the threat was over,

Marcello: You mentioned that after about five days there, you were guarding prisoners. What kind of prisoners were these?

Prentice: Just the soldiers that had done something and had been put in the guardhouse--not nothing serious, I don't think. They had to go out everyday on a work detail, and you had to go along with your shotgun.

Marcello: In the days immediately following the attack, what provisions were taken to get ready for an invasion or an assault or something of that nature? Were there any preparations taken there at Fort "Kam?"

Prentice: Well, I'm sure there were an awful lot of preparations being made, but I don't . . . I'm sure that everybody went on wartime basis. All the batteries that were supposed to be at the other points of the island, they got there where they were supposed to be, and they stayed there. And it was the same way with all the other units on the island. They had their jobs to do, and they stayed where they were supposed to stay.

I can remember on Christmas day that I was on a garbage detail, and things were really messed up. But then things got leveled off, and there wasn't so much . . . there was still a lot of . . . you know, the war was really going on, and everybody was listening for something in the way of good

news, because they knew this was so bad.

Then, eventually, they called me up from Fort Shafter and wanted me to work at Fort Shafter in the office of the 53rd Brigade, which was really the antiaircraft headquarters for the whole island. I went over there, and I don't know really what did happen. I do know that when I was in the 53rd Brigade, I left and went to the OCS about a year later, and then I went back to Saipan in a couple of years. Some of the guys that I had known in the 53rd Brigade were . . . no, it was Okinawa. They were on Okinawa, and some of them were just going home for the first time in about four or five years. So I felt I did the right thing by going to OCS.

Marcello: When was it that you were able to get word home to your folks that you were all right?

Prentice: Oh, yes, that was something that they did promptly. In the afternoon that's one thing that our officers did do. They allowed us to send a telegram home.

Marcello: I'm sure that you were restricted as to what you could say in that telegram.

Prentice: Oh, yes. They told us to just say we were safe and sound, don't worry, and that kind of thing.

Marcello: How long did you remain on the Hawaiian Islands before you left there?

Prentice: About thirteen or fourteen months.

Marcello: Where did you go to officers candidate school?

Prentice: Miami Beach.

Marcello: So you did come back to the States for it.

Prentice: Yes. I was back in the States for a couple of years , , , well, really longer than that . . .probably two-and-a-half years. Then I went back overseas again for about a year.

Marcello: Okay, I think that's probably a good place to end this interview, Mr. Prentice. I want to thank you very much for having taken time to talk with me. You've said a lot of very interesting and important things, and I'm sure the scholars will find your comments quite valuable when they use them to write about Pearl Harbor.

Prentice: Well, thank you for taking the time to come over and take the story. I'm sure there really isn't a whole lot that I said, because it's hard to remember that kind of stuff.

Marcello: Well, like I said before, every bit of information that we gather is more than what we had before we started.

Prentice: One thing I did want to mention is that we never lost our sense of humor. Things happened and everybody got one heck of a kick out of a lot of things. I really think that's what kept everybody going, is the ability to laugh at a lot of silly things.

Marcello: Can you remember any funny things that actually happened during the attack itself?

Prentice: I can remember the next day. We were down at this Battery Hasbrook, and this guy that was the colonel down there heard about this submarine. It was that night. He wanted this corporal to go up on this lookout point. You had to climb up some steep steps and go up kind of high and open the trap door and get up there and look and see if you could see any submarines. I had been up there, and there's always a real strong wind blowing up there; and that wind always blows that trap door down, and it scares the devil out of you. This guy was a real scary-cat type of guy, and he was the kind of guy that was the dirtiest-mouthed guy you ever heard. But then as soon as there was an alert or something like that, he'd start reading his Bible (laughter). It was really funny.

Anyway, the colonel sent this guy up there, and he was yelling back at the colonel, "I don't see anything, colonel! I don't see anything, colonel!" He was going back up. Finally, he got up to that trap door, and I knew what was going to happen. Then I heard that thing slam, and the colonel says, "Corporal, what do you hear up there? What do you see up there, corporal? Are you all right up there? What do you see? Speak! Say something!" He finally put his head over the rail, and he said, "Colonel, if a cannon had gone up your ass, you wouldn't be able to say anything,

either!" (laughter). That's the idea, That thing was so loud. Everybody just had hysterics about that.

Marcello: And he thought it was a cannon?

Prentice: Yes, I mean, that trap door made such a loud noise. It was just like a Texas wind. It got hold of it and slammed it down. It scared me when I went up there, and so I knew it.

Marcello: In the meantime, were those civilians there at Battery Hasbrook . . . I don't want to use the words "behaving themselves." That's not a good way to put it, But were they cooperating, and did they seem to be rather calm most of the time and so on, or did they create problems for you?

Prentice: Well, they really didn't create problems, because it wasn't too long before they were on their way back to the States. They were a problem for a while, because there wasn't anyplace to put them. They had to put them in these various batteries around there for safety, and, of course, I'm sure some of them were really pretty brave and obviously not particularly scared, but there were a lot of them that were scared.

Marcello: And how long were they in the Battery Hasbrook?

Prentice: Well, I think I was there like about five or six days, and after that I don't know really what happened.

Marcello: Okay, once again, I want to thank you very much for participating.

Prentice: You're welcome.