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Interview with
JOHN D. GUNTHER
May 6, 1984

Place of Interview: Norfolk, Virginia

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Oral History Collection

John D. Gunther

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello Date of Interview: May 6, 1984

Place of Interview: Norfolk, Virginia

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing John Gunther for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 6, 1984, in Norfolk, Virginia. I'm interviewing Mr. Gunther in order to get his reminiscences, experiences, and impressions while he was a member of Headquarters Company, 65th Engineers, at Schofield Barracks during the Japanese attack there on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Gunther, 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.

Mr. Gunther: All right. I was born on November 25, 1923, in Galesburg, Illinois. It's 52,000 now; it's just a small town. I went through high school...and I was a cook for a short-order place, you know, hamburgers, whatever...hotdogs.

The draft came by, in 1941, but I was too young for it. I was sixteen-and-a-half. My two cousins had enlisted because they wanted to get away from the draft, and they went to Panama. So I went down to the local post office and

enlisted in the Army. Nine days later, I ended up in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Marcello: You were sixteen-and-a-half years old when you enlisted?

Gunther: Yes. My parents had to sign for me.

Marcello: But you actually could get into the service at sixteen-and-a-half.

Gunther: Oh, yes, if your parents signed for you. This was a rule that all the services had.

Marcello: Why did you want to go into the service?

Gunther: Well, I can't say it was a premonition or what. I wanted to join my two cousins, but, then again, I had a feeling that something was up because they hurried the draft. They drafted eighteen-year-olds on up and all this good stuff. I don't know. I just had a feeling that something was going to come up soon.

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

Gunther: Well, I had selected the Navy, and they refused me because I had flat feet. So I went next door, next office, and enlisted in the Army. It was the 17th of July, 1941. Then we were shipped to Angel Island, California, which is now a park. It's in the San Francisco Bay. I spent a week there, and then we boarded an old ship and went to Honolulu.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of being assigned to the Hawaiian Islands?

Gunther: Well, there were mixed emotions, you might say. I had never been overseas...well, that to me was going across the world. Being a sixteen-and-a-half-year-old kid--green--I didn't know a whole lot about Army life, but I soon found out.

When we hit Honolulu, everybody was in khakis, of course, and we were herded onto busses, and we went to Schofield. There was a sergeant there sitting at a desk, and he said, "What do you want to do?" I said, "I'd like to be a telephone repairman." So right away he wrote "Engineers." The Hawaiian Department hadn't been split then--in those days. It didn't split until September of 1941. What I mean by "split" is that the Hawaiian Department formed the 24th Infantry Division and all its support units and then the 25th Division with all its support units. This was in August or September, I'm not really sure. But anyhow, I took my basic training. I think that was nine weeks, you know, drill and all this good stuff...Army customs, things of this sort. And then the Hawaiian Department split, and I went to the 65th Engineers. It was a bailey bridge Company. We built bridges, repaired airfields, runways--things of this sort. We built small buildings. I got training in that, and I got training in demolition and things of this sort.

But I still had in the back of my mind that I was going

to be a cook, so I went to cook's school. After that I went into Headquarters Company as a cook. It was during the days when they had so much, oh, specialist rank...it wasn't specialist...like, you'd be a PFC, private first class, first class cook or baker or whatever. In other words, you had one stripe and then three or four stripes below. It was real weird. I don't have any of them right now.

I got kind of tired of being a cook, so I went to the motor pool. I learned to drive and...finally, the colonel's driver had gone home. He was assigned somewhere else in the continental United States, so I got to be the colonel's driver, the battalion commander. Colonel Palmer Reeves was his name. He was the 65th Combat Engineers battalion commander. In the command car that I was driving was a radio that was the battalion net. Each company had a radio operator, a command car with a radio, and we'd spread out all over the island and have communications either by telegraph key or voice. We would go all over the place. My Lord!

This is building up to December 7. That particular weekend, Friday, I was on KP duty.

Marcello: Let's back up at this moment because there are a lot of other things I want to talk about.

Gunther: Okay.

Marcello: So during this short time that you were at Schofield Barracks, you had taken your basic training?

Gunther: Yes.

Marcello: You had worked in the engineer company?

Gunther: Yes, I did.

Marcello: You can cook; you worked in the motor pool; and now you were a driver for this colonel.

Gunther: I was a driver for the battalion commander, right.

Marcello: Let's talk a little about life in that pre-Pearl Harbor Army there at Schofield Barracks. First of all, describe for me what your quarters were like there at Schofield. Suppose I'm coming into Schofield Barracks. Take me on a tour of your quarters. I suppose you lived in one of the quadrangles.

Gunther: Yes. We were the first quadrangle up from Wheeler Field. I would guess we were about a thousand yards from it. We go into the center of the quadrangle, which is a grassy part, and there's a PT (physical training) stand where the instructor would take the company and give us the "dirty dozen." Behind that was the bandstand, where every Sunday we'd have concerts and things of this sort...smokers, boxing. Off to the right would be the small PX, the barber shop, tailor's, laundry...you name it...shoe repair.

Marcello: These would all be facing in toward the quadrangle.

Gunther: Yes, everything is facing toward the center of the quadrangle.

As much as I can recall, Headquarters Company was adjacent to the PX part of it. Then A Company, B Company, C Company, and D Company were interspaced in different buildings, you might say, on the quadrangle. There were also the quartermaster, military police, and...I think the four buglers were in that quadrangle. They were for Reveille...let's see... Reveille, Retreat, Taps...they did all the bugle calls in those days, and you had to remember what they were (chuckle).

Marcello: How many stories were these quadrangles?

Gunther: These were three-story. They looked like adobe, but they were much sturdier than that. They were steel-reinforced concrete.

Marcello: Where would the actual living and sleeping quarters be for the men?

Gunther: The orderly room was on the first floor, and that's always on the first floor. The arms room and the supply room are on the first floor. The second and third floors were an open bay. You had, oh, anywhere from fifty to sixty people. Plus, you had one large room that none of the lower echelons ever got into. That was the non-commissioned officer's room. He was either...they either had squad leaders or platoon sergeants in those days. Very rarely did I see a second lieutenant as a platoon leader because they were always concerned with the company duties. At one end of the bay, we had showers and latrines, and off to the right

was our rifle racks where we had our .03 rifles. As I got into the 65th Engineers, at that particular time, in September, we changed from .03's to the new M-1 Garand, and everybody had a sore thumb (laughter).

Marcello: They had the "M-1 thumb," huh?

Gunther: Yes, "M-1 thumb." That was quite a deal. On the third floor was the same layout. Of course...let's see...there's one, two, three, four...six lines of bunks. Sometimes... yes, the third floor was double bunks--one on top of the other--because they had so many people come in at that particular time. That's about all I recall of the way it was built.

Marcello: As you look back on those quarters, were they fairly comfortable or uncomfortable?

Gunther: Oh, they were comfortable to me. I was from the North Country, Illinois. Of course, it got cool at night--just like San Francisco. You could sweat in the daytime and freeze at night if you didn't have a blanket. To me they were very comfortable, spacious, roomy. Everybody knew what everybody else was about--if they were going on pass or whatever.

Marcello: Describe what the windows and so on were like.

Gunther: As far as windows per se, there was only one side of the room that had windows on it, and that was the back side. You could see what the other quadrangle was doing. The drill

field was beyond the quadrangle we were in. In the front was just a large arc. There were four or five arcs that... well, they had wooden doors, but they were always open. Sometimes we would go on FTX, which is a field training exercise. The sergeants would come in, blow the whistle, and you had better be out in five minutes with your full gear on. Then we'd move out to either Waianae Pass or Kolekole--someplace to bivouac overnight.

Marcello: You mentioned these large arcs. Is this what they commonly refer to as the sallyport?

Gunther: Yes, that's what they were called--sallyport.

Marcello: I gather, then, that each quadrangle was essentially a self-contained unit in many ways.

Gunther: Yes, definitely it was because you had...well, your own mess hall was in each company. You had your own cooks. Then in those days, a private, which I was at that time, was getting \$18.75 a month. Now the first sergeant had what we called chit books. You had chit books for the PX, for a haircut, to get your shoes done. Our campaign hats had to be blocked with brown sugar and hot water.

Marcello: I'd never heard that before.

Gunther: An Oriental did this. You'd take the cord off. We had the cord on top of the hat. The officers had gold and silver. We had red and white for engineers. That was quite a thing. You'd get caught out in a rainstorm, and

you've got brown all over your face, running down into your uniform and everything (laughter). It was quite an experience, but I loved it. Then on that one side you had the PX. Cigarettes, by the way, were fifty cents a carton in those days. Oh, we had a beer hall. We had a tailorshop, barber-shop, and a laundry. They had a laundryman who was Oriental. He'd come around every once in a while and pick up your dirty clothes, and then the next week they'd come back. His name was S.P. Choy. That's one name that rings a bell because he was later found out to be not a hundred percent. He was later found out to be a spy.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit more about the barracks life in the pre-Pearl Harbor Army.

Gunther: Oh, it was quite a life. After you came out of basic, you had to learn your general orders and everything about... you had to field-strip your weapon and know each piece by heart and know each piece and know its serial number. You had to know your own serial number and who was who in the company, as far as rank was concerned.

Then after you come out of basic training, you're really "one of the fellows." If you worked at the mess hall, you got up at four o'clock in the morning. Of course, they didn't like being waked up that early in the morning. If you were in the motor pool, you went with the mechanics and heavy equipment operators and all that. Everybody had their

own clique, more or less.

First off, after you got out of basic training, you had to get a Hawaiian shirt. That was to denote you from the tourists, more or less. Of course, our short haircuts ...we had what we called a "butch" haircut, real short.

During duty days you saluted quite a bit because you had to. If you didn't salute an officer, that was a court-martial offense. If you didn't say "sir" or something of this sort...military customs was to the "nth" degree, I would say. It's worth it because it teaches people discipline. I don't see much of it today, really.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned that your pay was \$18.75 a month.

Gunther: That's correct.

Marcello: Where did the 20 percent men fit in?

Gunther: Twenty percent? I don't understand that.

Marcello: Well, from what I gather, when one ran low on money or ran out of money and had to borrow money, there was always a 20 percent man around.

Gunther: Oh, yes, one for two. There used to be a dayroom orderly, and he was always in money. I couldn't understand it until now. He was running a floating crap game, a poker game, and he'd take a percentage. Then for the kids who were suddenly out of money, why, he'd loan them money--one dollar for two dollars back on payday...or chit books.

Marcello: So, loansharking was a rather common practice, given that

low pay.

Gunther: Oh, yes, definitely.

Marcello: You mentioned gambling. How widespread was gambling at Schofield Barracks in that pre-Pearl Harbor Army?

Gunter: Actually, well, there used to be little huts that we would call equipment huts or wagon huts. They'd take one of the old wagons, lay a blanket down--that already had numbers on it--and use it for a dice table. Just about every Friday night, you could figure on fifteen or twenty people participating in a dice game.

Marcello: Would there be some pretty high stakes?

Gunther: I've seen some fairly high--\$500-\$600--pots.

Marcello: What was the attitude of the authorities toward gambling on post?

Gunther: Oh, they frowned on this immensely. If you were caught gambling, it was a court-martial, and more or less you wouldn't have anything on your arm regardless of what your rank was. They'd break you all the way down.

Marcello: How rigidly was this rule against gambling enforced?

Gunther: I don't think it was enforced too good.

Marcello: In other words, I was going to ask you if you ever knew of a game that was broken up.

Gunther: No. I heard about them, but I had never been around when they were broken up. Well, the military police guarded the main gates. They had town patrols. That was just about the

most of it except for the main beer garden at Schofield, which we used to call the Punchbowl. I understand that it's now a military cemetery.

Marcello: Awhile ago you were also talking about the price of cigarettes. Is it not true that around payday you would buy the so called tailor-made cigarettes, and then after payday and beyond it was Bull Durham?

Gunther: Bull Durham or Target or whichever was the cheapest.

Marcello: In other words, you had to make your own.

Gunther: That's true. If you couldn't roll a cigarette, you're out of it (chuckle). That was quite a thing.

Marcello: What role did athletics play in the life of that pre-Pearl Harbor Army?

Gunther: I'm glad you asked because in the athletics part of it, I got to box a little bit. I got to play football. I got to play baseball. Each company was very...oh, I'd say, almost fanatic in their end of either baseball or football or boxing. Those were the three main athletics that we had, that we were interested in. We had quite a lively competition.

Marcello: Awhile ago, you mentioned Colonel Reeves as being in charge of this company.

Gunther: Not the company. He was the battalion commander.

Marcello: Was there any active recruiting by the higher-ups in the company or the battalion for athletes?

Gunther: Usually, we had an athletic officer who was either warrant

or second lieutenant. Then the company commander...if he looked at a person and thought, "Well, my goodness, he's got a very good build. We can use him in the football team," or whatever, they'd go around and ask, "Have you done any boxing? Golden Gloves?" Fortunately, or unfortunately, I had three fights...I won three and lost the fourth one. Their idea of weight class was not really refined. As an example, I'm 6'1", and in those days I weighed about 160 pounds. I was a lightweight. They put a Marine in on me. He was something like 6'4" and weighed over 200 pounds. I lasted one-and-a-half rounds. With the disparity between height and weight and all this, you were lucky if you got out.

Marcello: How did they come about recruiting you for boxing?

Gunther: Well, this particular thing...this sounds more or less like From Here to Eternity. Actually, they asked me, "Have you ever boxed before? Have you ever played baseball?" I played a little American Legion ball when I was home. I said, "Yes, I play first base, and I can box a little bit." So they put me in the ring with one of the instructors. This guy had been there for three or four years. They said, "Okay, you'll do. We'll get you out of all the details. We'll get you out of KP and all this good stuff if you stick with the gym." So after that fourth fight, I just forgot it. I didn't want anymore to do with it.

Marcello: What did that mean, then, in terms of these little privileges that you had had while you were boxing?

Gunther: Oh, all I had to do was work out one or two hours a day, and the rest of the day was mine.

Marcello: Now what happens when you don't box anymore?

Gunther: When you don't box, you go back into the company. You do all the...well, you do KP, and police call. We'd pick up cigarette butts and matchsticks all over the place. We had different little "dirty details," we'd call them, or you'd go over to the motor pool and wash down trucks. If you really messed up, they'd send you to the pack train. We had mules that--I think there was sixty mules--that were used to go over mountainous terrain. They carried a small .75-caliber howitzer. That's a pack howitzer, is what it's called. You had to dress down the mules and clean them up and feed them and all this, that is, if you really goofed up.

Marcello: But this is the sort of thing that you perhaps might have to look forward to if you dropped out of the athletic competition, is that correct?

Gunther: That's true.

Marcello: I guess this conjures up in my memory Robert E. Lee Prewitt in From Here to Eternity.

Gunther: Right, absolutely. Yes, From Here to Eternity was very close to the real thing.

Marcello: That's one of the reasons I'm asking you these questions.

Gunther: Yes, I liked that. That's one of my favorite movies.

Marcello: That's one of my favorite books.

Gunther: Yes, I love it.

Marcello: Could participation in athletics at this level of competition also be helpful in terms of promotion?

Gunther: Yes, definitely, definitely. If you stuck with it, say, you went in as a PFC, the next corporal rank that would come by would probably get you two stripes on your sleeve. If you stuck, say, with boxing and won three or four fights, four or five or whatever...I don't remember what the criteria was, but I've known a lot of football players that would rise in rank up to as far as staff sergeant. In those days that was a lot of money.

Marcello: What kind of reaction did this sort of thing create among the rest of the enlisted personnel?

Gunther: Well, they used to call the athletic NCO's "Hollywood" persons. What was it they called them? "Jawbone." "Jawbone" was when you were an acting corporal or whatever. The "Hollywood" boys were the athletic people. I don't think there was much dissension really. It was just envy probably.

Marcello: How about the Army chow? Did the athlete's fare a little better at chow time than the regular enlisted personnel?

Gunther: I don't think so for the simple reason that we had homestyle

meals. Everything was put in large containers and set on the table. But the food was excellent because in those days the mess sergeant was given "X" amount of dollars for the month, and he had to prepare his menu and buy the fresh vegetables and meats that they had in Honolulu at that time. See, beef was shipped over...well, beef, pork, veal. Any fresh meat was shipped over on refrigerator ships. He would go down to the market on Hotel Street...no, not Hotel. I don't remember the name of the street, but there was enormous warehouses. They had spices, coconuts, and everything...and the meats and fresh vegetables that were grown on the island. He'd go by the menu. You had very good chow. I haven't heard it called "chow" in years (chuckle).

Marcello: Describe what the beer halls or the beer gardens were like on Schofield. You seemed to indicate that there were at least two different kinds. There was one in the quadrangle, and there seemed to be a large one for Schofield Barracks itself.

Gunther: Yes. The large one up at the Punchbowl was...oh, my gosh, it was as large as a warehouse, really. Along one side they had the bar, and the only thing you could get there was beer. You could get it by the glass or a pitcher. I don't recall the price of it. It was nominal, of course. There were tables and chairs for everybody. Each outfit

would get together and talk over the day's troubles, so to speak. The little company beer hall--actually, it was a PX and beer hall--had a few tables and a few chairs. Once those were taken up, we sat on the floor. We'd have a pitcher of beer next to us, and yak away and drink a few.

Marcello: When was the beer hall open?

Gunther: It was only open after five o'clock because during duty hours you were strictly soldiers, and then after that you could partake of the PX variety.

Marcello: Probably the beer garden was patronized the least around payday. Is that a fair assessment?

Gunther: That's true. Very few people would go there...normally, on payday you have payday activities, or if you were on duty, you had to stay there and do your duty. The guys with the free time would get a taxi for fifty cents and go to Honolulu.

Marcello: How far away was Honolulu?

Gunther: I think it was around twenty miles. We'd go down the main highway. A lot of us walked because there was only a few cabs, and you wanted to save that fifty cents for when you got into town, anyhow (chuckle).

Marcello: How often would you normally get into Honolulu?

Gunther: I, myself, went in about twice a month. Some of them had girlfriends or wives, and they'd go almost every night, especially the married fellows.

Marcello: When you went to Honolulu, would you stay overnight or would you come back the same day?

Gunther: I'd come back the same day.

Marcello: Why was that?

Gunther: Well, for two reasons. I didn't want to spend money for something I didn't need, such as a hotel room, which was not cheap in those days. Secondly, if you stayed out over eleven o'clock at night, the Shore Patrol would get you, and then they'd send you back with a delinquency report, and that would go on your record. So we would catch the shuttle bus or a taxi or whatever and come back to the base.

Marcello: So you had to be out of Honolulu by eleven o'clock.

Gunther: Oh, yes, you had to be off the streets by eleven.

Marcello: How about on weekends?

Gunther: The weekend was a little more lenient. If you had a weekend pass, the MP's would stop you for your pass. Now if it wasn't a weekend pass, you were in trouble. We'd go over to the YMCA, and you could stay there overnight for, oh, forty cents a night, something like that. They had very good food, too.

Marcello: When you went into Honolulu, what would be your liberty routine? What would you do--you personally?

Gunther: Oh, I'd go get my Hawaiian shirt, of course. Then there was a little amusement park-type thing there on one of the

streets. They had a bow and arrow. You'd shoot balloons and get a doll or a stuffed pillow that says "Schofield Barracks"--the usual souvenir routine--and I'd send all that stuff home. We'd go to the YMCA and have lunch or dinner or whatever. Then we'd just go walking around, looking at the sights, listening to the music.

Marcello: What does the Black Cat Cafe mean to you?

Gunther: Whew! That's where I got my nose broke the first time (laughter).

Marcello: That sounds like an interesting story. Do you want to get it as part of an historical record?

Gunther: Sure. We got our pass, our weekend pass, this particular day, and I decided...I'd heard so much about the Black Cat, so three or four of us wandered downtown and got into the place. I had just gotten in the door, and two sailors and a Marine were at it. I'd just turned around, and somebody said, "Hey, John." So I turned around, and just as I did, here's a beer bottle right on the bridge of my nose. So I saw stars and everything else. That's my first, only, and last encounter with the Black Cat Cafe (chuckle). But all services went there. You couldn't help but start a fight, regardless. There was Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard. You name it, and they were in there.

There was esprit de corps. Now this is something I don't see much of today--pride in your unit or pride in the

outfit that you're in. You don't see that anymore. We were dedicated. I'm still dedicated to the United States because I was born here. This is my country, and I'll fight for it again. But esprit de corps was very, very good then. If you were in the Marine Corps, you backed it up; and the Army was the same way.

Marcello: And I gather there was quite a close-knit loyalty to one's ship if one were in the Navy.

Gunther: True. Right, right.

Marcello: I know that Robert E. Lee Prewitt in From Here to Eternity spent quite a bit of time down on Hotel Street.

Gunther: Yes, that was the--how should I put it--bawdy house district, the red light district. There was one particular individual that lived there. Her name was "Big Virginia." And she was big. She was over three hundred pounds, at least.

Marcello: You want to tell me a little bit about "Big Virginia?"

Gunther: Well, the only thing I remember...they used to tell me about it. I didn't go down because, well, I had a pretty strict upbringing, and I just really didn't believe in it. They used to tell me about that gal. She was something else.

I'll tell you one thing that happened. Now this is a true fact. They were getting two dollars a trick, and they wanted to jump it to four. The Army, Navy, Marine Corps said, "No! We'll boycott you! We won't come near

your places if you raise it!" So they raised it to three dollars, and everybody was satisfied. They were happy.

Marcello: A compromise, in other words.

Gunther: Right (chuckle).

Marcello: There was a little town close to Schofield Barracks called Wahiawa.

Gunther: Wahiawa, right.

Marcello: What do you know about it?

Gunther: It was a pleasant little village. The people there were very friendly. That's where the hula girls used to come from. Once in a while, we'd have a company come in, and they'd give a show. They'd have several hula girls and the guitar players. They'd sing Hawaiian songs. We used to get up and dance with them--do the hula. It was quite nice. Wahiawa was a very nice little town to me.

Marcello: What was there to do over there?

Gunther: You picked your own...whatever you wanted to do. If you wanted to pick up some money, you could go to Dole Pineapple and pick pineapples for fifty cents a day and all the pineapples you could eat. I hated pineapples (chuckle). Oh, you could work on your off-duty hours. You could do just about anything--anything that they would hire you for.

Marcello: Some people have indicated to me that Wahiawa was off-limits. Is that true or not?

Gunther: The bars and the houses were off-limits, I don't really

know why--probably the proximity to Schofield or something of that sort. Though why would that be off-limits and Hasebe's not be?

Marcello: Okay, discuss Hasebe's.

Gunther: Hasebe's was a joint. It was a joint that had beer, wine, whiskey, whatever--whatever you could pay for--and girls, of course. If you went in there, you better keep your hand on your hip pocket where your wallet is. There was a few shady stories told about Hasebe and some of his people. I don't know. I wasn't there. But I was at Schofield. I don't know. I heard a lot of stories about him.

Marcello: Some of the scuttlebut that I've heard seemed to indicate that he was a Japanese spy or something along that line.

Gunther: Yes, he was a spy. He had some of his people--now this was told to me by one of the sergeants in the company--that in the sugar cane fields he had directed his people to cut certain areas of the sugar cane into arrows pointing toward Pearl, so they could direct all the attacking aircraft down toward Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Had you ever seen Hasebe himself?

Gunther: I saw him once.

Marcello: Was he an Oriental?

Gunther: So-so, probably half. A Nisei, I would imagine. In the Hawaiian Islands, there are very few pure Hawaiians. There're inter-mixed races. There are Portuguese, French,

Spanish, Filipino, Irish, Japanese, you name it--from the Orient to Honolulu. There are very many inter-mixed races, you might say. The name they hung on me was Hap Haoli. That means half-Hawaiian. I took the customs of some of the Hawaiian boys. We had more Hawaiian people or island people in our company than any company in the battalion.

Marcello: And they called you what?

Gunther: Hap Haoli. That stuck with me all through my service days.

Marcello: I do know that at least for a portion of time before the war, the military operated on what were called tropical work hours, that is, most of the work was completed by noon, and then in the afternoon things kind of slacked off. What do you know about that?

Gunther: Yes. On Sunday you go to breakfast. After breakfast you'd work out or do whatever you wanted to. Then at noon, high noon, was what was known as quiet hour. For one hour, sixty minutes, you could sleep. You couldn't talk, couldn't play a radio. You had to be quiet. So everybody rested. During the week we had, like you said, tropical work hours. We'd work until noon. Then from noon we'd relax, take a shower, whatever. Then at five o'clock, we all fell out for retreat. After retreat was supper or dinner, and you went your merry way. I loved it. It

was fantastic.

Marcello: Now as one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to get worse, could you in your position detect any changes in the routine there at Schofield Barracks, particularly in your training routine?

Gunther: Yes. Our training was stepped up quite a bit. I don't recall why. We were given the new M-1 rifles, and we went to the firing range. If you didn't pass, if you didn't make a certain score, you stayed there until you did. Of course, our field gear and all this was kept up to snuff. Everybody knew his job and where he was going. Training was just intensified a little bit.

Marcello: How about alerts and maneuvers and things of that nature?

Gunther: We had a couple of alerts. I think there was one in November--first part of November--and then in the last part of November, we were on alert.

Marcello: What did that alert entail, do you recall?

Gunther: Well, we got all of our vehicles from the motor pool, packed them as we were ready to move out, got all the troops aboard, and went up to some large hill. I don't recall what it is. We made our battalion command post and everything, you know, just like a regular battalion.

Marcello: How long did you stay out on that alert, do you recall?

Gunther: We stayed out one night and came back the next afternoon.

Then there was a critique as to what was supposed to have been done and what wasn't done and how we could correct it.

Marcello: What was your specific function during those alerts? Now by this time, you were a driver, is that correct?

Gunther: Right. I would immediately go to the motor pool, get the command car, make sure the radio was on, gas it up, check the oil, tires, you know, get my weapon and put it in the boot next to the steering wheel, pick up the radio operator first, and then we'd go pick up the colonel. He would already have his gear at the battalion headquarters. My gear would be there, and the radio operator's gear would be there. We would either head the column or go to the rear of the column, and we would proceed to where we were going.

Marcello: By this time, how closely were you keeping abreast of current events and world affairs and things of that nature?

Gunther: Not really. I was too busy learning to be a soldier. I do know that President Roosevelt was going to come on the islands. I don't know whether it was that year or not. I don't think so. Anyhow, he was supposed to come to the Hawaiian Islands and look over the troops. He was talking to the Hawaiian governor then. There seemed to be a little bit tighter security on the post. That's about all I remember of it, really.

Marcello: When you and your buddies sat around in your bull sessions, was there ever any conversation relative to a possible

Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor?

Gunther: No, there wasn't, really. We were concerned more with local things, like, who was going to be the next battalion boxing champion and all this stuff. War never entered my mind, but there was just that little nagging feeling in the back of my mind that something was going to happen, and soon. But I couldn't pin it down.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that weekend of December 7, 1941. Of course, we want to go into this period in as much detail as possible. Describe for me what your activities were during that weekend leading up to December 7. I'm referring to either Friday or Saturday or both.

Gunther: Okay. On Friday I had gone to the motor pool. The radio operator and myself operated a grid net. That only lasted about two or two-and-a-half hours. After that I took the command car back to the motor pool, washed it down, cleaned it out, and tied down the antenna, which was about eighteen feet long. Then I was finished, so I went back to the barracks and read the bulletin board. You had to read it three times a day.

Lo and behold, I was on KP Saturday. On Saturday morning I went down to the kitchen and reported to the mess steward. I was immediately put to work slicing bacon. We got bacon in the whole side. We didn't get it sliced in those days yet. Now we had to slice the bacon and then

cut the rind off of it with a little bit of the fat still on it. We used that on the griddle to fry pancakes or whatever. I did various little odd jobs during the day. Late in the afternoon, right after supper, we closed up the kitchen, cleaned the mess hall up, and mopped it down and all this. I went back upstairs.

Then the CO (charge-of-quarters) came up and asked if anybody would like to sit with him, you know, play cards or be a company runner to go from one company to the next taking messages. I had nothing to do. I had already showered and got in my fatigue uniform. I went down. We sat around until about eleven-thirty.

I do remember this one fellow. He used to play Intermezzo on his violin, and it was gorgeous, just beautiful. I can't remember his name. He was the company clerk, too. He played up until, oh, I guess, around one o'clock. Then I started reading. As a company runner, I had two messages--one to B Company and one to Delta Company.

At four-thirty in the morning I was supposed to go up and wake up the KP's for the morning, and I did. I went back down in the mess hall, got the CO a cup of coffee, and myself one. We sat and jawed for a little bit.

Marcello: Incidentally, was there anything eventful that happened that Saturday night while you were there in the barracks?

Gunther: Not that I recall. Oh, yeah! I remember our All-Island lightweight boxer was beaten up by a bunch of fellows down in Honolulu. What people were left in the company were rolled out, and we went down to clean them out. Or they did. I had to stay with the CO. The upshot of it was that it was a bunch of MP's that had gotten hold of this kid. I guess he'd had a couple too many. He didn't like MP's, anyhow, even though he lived right across the quadrangle from us. That was the only incident that I know of that took place on Saturday night.

Marcello: So were there very many people in the barracks that night?

Gunther: I guess there were about thirty, maybe thirty-five.

Marcello: How many would normally be in there?

Gunther: Oh, our company strength was about around 325--about that number.

Marcello: So there was a bunch of people in Honolulu or someplace out of the barracks that night.

Gunther: Oh, yes. Oh, yes there were. At seven-twenty I was supposed to go up to the third floor and wake up one of the sergeants, the platoon sergeant. I looked all over the barracks, and I couldn't find him, so finally I went back into the orderly room and the mess hall. Somebody said, "Oh, he's in the mess hall right now. He's having his breakfast."

And then I was to wake up two of the drivers. They

were supposed to go out. We had people on guard at the ammo dump. This was getting right close to the time that they came over. This was about ten or fifteen minutes before it all started.

Marcello: Incidentally, when was payday?

Gunther: Payday was the first of the month--every first of the month --but if it was on a Sunday, you had to wait until Monday.

Marcello: So that meant that on that weekend of December 7, people perhaps had some money, and they would have been in town.

Gunther: Yes, they had. Most of them would have been in town.

Marcello: Okay, pick up the story from on that Sunday morning.

Gunther: I went up to get these two drivers. One was on the second floor. I got him up. Then I had to go up the stairs, two flights of stairs. In December it's still fairly warm there, and I was kind of lazy, anyhow. My stomach was full.

I went up to the third floor to get this kid up, and all of a sudden there are three little sparks off the side of the building. I looked around, and here comes this aircraft--just barreling at us. I thought, "Oh, my God, the Air Force has gone crazy!" We all thought the Air Force was on maneuvers until one of the guys, one of the sergeants, recognized the red meatball on the side of the aircraft. He said, "That's Japanese!"

So we tried to get hold of the supply sergeant to

open up the arms room. He wasn't there, so one of our sergeants--I think it was the platoon sergeant--broke the door down. They started issuing out all kinds of weapons

Marcello: What did he use to break down the door?

Gunther: We had a big iron bar. He hit it right at the lock. It was a double lock, but he hit both of the locks and punched them out and then just opened the door up.

Marcello: Was there any hesitation before doing this?

Gunther: Yes, there was quite a few conversations going on at once. This sergeant says, "Just cool it. He lives off the post," meaning the supply sergeant. So we broke the door down and got all kinds of weapons out. I had a .45 and a M-1. We were issued ammo, also. So the young sergeant formed about twenty of the people with rifles into a block. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Marcello: Describe it.

Gunther: Well, there would be three ranks. The first rank would kneel, the second rank would stand and fire at a given signal, and the third rank would back up the first rank. They did that for, oh, several minutes for every aircraft that came by. Well, there was only about three of them that came by. I know for sure that we hit two.

Marcello: Were you in one of these blocks?

Gunther: No, I was on the roof with a .30-caliber.

Marcello: Okay, describe what was happening up on the roof. Describe,

first of all, how you managed to go up there.

Gunther: Well, one of the other sergeants came by, and he said, "Let's get the machine guns and go up on the roof. We can't hit anything down here." So we had four machine guns, two water-cooled and two air-cooled .30-calibers. I was the ammo loader on one of the .30-calibers. We saw these aircraft just all over the place, and three of them came at us. The kid over next to us, I think, hit one. I'm pretty sure he did. Our gun was going, and the other two on the other side, oh, they were giving it everything.

Marcello: What function were you performing on this gun?

Gunther: Well, they load from the right side. I would hold the belt so it wouldn't get twisted. If it gets twisted, you're not going to fire. So I kept the belt straight. I was laying on my belly. I had my elbows up like this (gesture), and the belt was coming out of the canister and over my hands. We fired at just about anything that moved.

Marcello: Describe the activity of these Japanese planes in terms of their height, speed, what you could see, and that sort of thing--what they were doing.

Gunther: As far as I recall, they were Zeros and Betty bombers and, I think, torpedo planes. I'm not entirely sure. They would circle. They would make a concentrated circle. Then all of a sudden, they would go off on a tangent and attack just about anything that would move. They'd shoot...well, they

did. They shot one of the busses, the shuttle bus, and wounded quite a few people. They dropped bombs on buildings. They dropped them on our quadrangle.

The first casualty I remember seeing was a sergeant. He ran catty-cornered across the quadrangle, the grassy part, and I noticed blood underneath both arms and behind his knees. I think it was a concussion bomb that went off and caught him. He was the first casualty I remember. I don't think we had any in our company.

Marcello: Now when you were up there on the roof helping to man that machine gun, was the firing constant?

Gunther: No, no, it wasn't constant because we were taught to fire in bursts of five--five shots--and then let it rest and then five shots.

Marcello: But was this procedure constant while the attack was going on?

Gunther: Yes, it definitely was.

Marcello: Did you seem to notice that Schofield was a specific target, or was Schofield an afterthought?

Gunther: I thought it was, but now that I look back on it, Schofield was in the way of Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: And Wheeler Field was close by, wasn't it?

Gunther: Yes, Wheeler Field was strafed by, oh, gosh, a whole lot of planes. That particular weekend, they had gotten in... I don't remember the number, but it was a large number of

young pilots who had just returned from the States. They didn't have room for them in the BOQ (Bachelor Officer's Quarters), so they put them out in five-man tents on the tarmac. These tents were strafed, also. We had the P-40D's. We didn't have the P-40E then. And they had brought in some ...from what I thought, they were B-17D's.

Marcello: At about what altitude were these Japanese planes coming in over Schofield?

Gunther: They were just over the treetops. I'd say they were at fifty, sixty, maybe a hundred feet at the most.

Marcello: Could you distinguish the pilots?

Gunther: Yes.

Marcello: Describe as best you can what their appearance looked like physically.

Gunther: Well, they had a helmet and goggles and fur collar--brown fur--and kind of a khaki flight suit. Some of them had the Japanese flag or whatever wrapped around their helmet. Some of them had their goggles down, and some didn't.

Intermingled in there were a few aircraft of our Navy. I remember a story that one of the boys in the motor pool told me. They had a gun set up--it was a .50-caliber--and they saw this aircraft coming at them, so they shot at it, and they knocked down a Navy pilot. He came back and let them know he wasn't in the opposing forces (chuckle).

Marcello: Incidentally, when the attack first started, do you recall any sirens sounding or bugles blowing Call-to-Arms or anything of that nature?

Gunther: No. But right about five or six minutes after it did start, we heard the bugles because they were right across the way from us. They gave the alert call.

Marcello: Approximately how long were you up on that roof firing at those Japanese planes?

Gunther: I was up on the roof...well, intermittently, I'd have to run down for ammo and bring more canisters up for the other guns. I'd say I was there approximately a half an hour at the most.

Marcello: How come you went up there as opposed to perhaps going over to the motor pool and getting the colonel's car ready?

Gunther: Well, the sergeant said, "Come with me." When a sergeant tells you, "Come with me," you'd better do it. Immediately, though, after all the firing stopped, I did go to the motor pool. The radio operator was on the roof with me, too, so we both ran as fast as we could to get the weapons carrier. The motor officer was there already, and so were some of the other drivers. They said, "Go about your normal duties." They pointed at us and said, "Go get the colonel, and we'll be ready to go."

Marcello: Now by this time was the attack pretty well over at Schofield?

Gunther: At Schofield it was pretty well over then, but we were directed

to go toward Honolulu and see what kind of beach defenses we could build.

Marcello: Incidentally, what kind of a day was this in terms of weather and climate?

Gunther: It was a gorgeous day. The sun had already come up, and there was very little wind.

Marcello: What about clouds?

Gunther: There were a few high clouds.

Marcello: Was it a good day for an air attack?

Gunther: Oh, yes, definitely--right out of the sun.

Marcello: Generally speaking, during this half-hour of battle, how would you describe the activities taking place? Were they done in an orderly manner? Was there confusion? Chaos?

Gunther: Let's see. At first there was some confusion because the younger people, like I was, didn't really know what was going on. But as soon as authority--now by that I mean a PFC, a corporal, or whatever--would come by, the confusion would go, and then we'd start in an orderly manner to do what we were supposed to do--to fight off whatever was coming at us.

Marcello: Did you see people shooting at the incoming airplanes with pistols and things of that nature?

Gunther: Oh, yes. This one sergeant that had the block of M-1's emptied, oh, three or four clips that I know of. We were a little bit angry. In fact, we were a whole lot angry.

Marcello: I guess this was one way that you could vent your anger even though as you look back on it in retrospect, you know that the chances of stopping one of those planes with a .45 was slim to none.

Gunther: Very nil.

Marcello: But you had to be doing something.

Gunther: Right. We felt very inadequate--at least I did--because here I am, one person, and they've got all kinds of aircraft and weapons.

Marcello: So you mentioned that you're now over at the motor pool about a half-hour later. You have the command car, and you're on your way to pick up the colonel. Describe that portion of the story.

Gunther: Well, we went through quite a bit of debris to get to the colonel's quarters.

Marcello: Such as?

Gunther: Oh, a couple of cars that were left unattended. When the strafing started, some of them were probably going to church. We had to wind our way around to get to the colonel. We picked him up and came back to Headquarters Company. He directed everything from there by telephone.

Marcello: How would you describe the colonel during this period?

Gunther: He was mad. He was absolutely furious. He had gotten some reports from Honolulu itself, and he was a little sad because he'd heard that Battleship Row had been hit very bad.

The Arizona had already gone down. He wanted to organize a bunch of underwater welders to go get the bodies out of the Arizona, but we couldn't do it because of the armor thickness. Right after that we loaded the trucks with barbed wire, and we went down and laid concertina wire all over the beaches. Every beach that we came to, we put out concertina wire.

Marcello: Now by this time had you left the colonel?

Gunther: No, the colonel was with us.

Marcello: When you say "we," I assume you're referring to the other people. In other words, you were still driving the colonel, and he was supervising this activity.

Gunther: Yes. There was myself...I was driving. The colonel was next to me in the front seat. The radio operator was in the back seat. He would pass on the commands from Colonel Reeves. All I was doing was driving around.

Marcello: Was the colonel performing in a rather professional manner?

Gunther: Oh, yes. He was a West Pointer. He was the epitome of officers, I would think. He was a terrific man, I don't know if he's alive today or not. I hope he is.

Marcello: How long were you continuing to string this concertina wire?

Gunther: Oh, well, we started that afternoon, and it went on, oh, for two or three days after that. Then one of the companies made tank traps, you know, the angle iron from that are in a cross. Those were put down, too. After that everything was pretty

smooth.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that after the attack was over, Schofield in essence was on the move? People were doing what they had to do?

Gunther: Oh, yes, definitely, definitely. They were picking up wounded and dead, repairing buildings that had been bombed.

Marcello: Were other units going out into the field and so on and so forth.

Gunther: Oh, yes. The infantry, such as the 27th, the 21st--I don't recall all the units--were on the move. The P-40's that had been brought in--that were safe, that were not harmed--were put up into the Chickamauga area. I think that was the 21st Infantry, but I'm not sure. Anyhow, the P-40's were brought up to Schofield, and they would take off from there on reconnaissance flights. After it was all over, things pretty well settled down.

Marcello: How were you feeling when things were all over? I'm assuming that while all this activity was taking place on Sunday morning, perhaps even a little bit into Sunday afternoon, that you were too busy to stop and think about the enormity or the consequences of what had happened.

Gunther: Right. Well, I was feeling two emotions. I was scared and mad. I'd heard of sailors and Marines and some of the GI's that had been killed and wounded, and I couldn't see why they would do this--of all days, on Sunday--when everybody

is relaxed. Well, that was their mode of operation probably. I don't know. It really hurt. It still hurts. I'll never forget it (weeping).

Marcello: What rumors did you hear in the aftermath of the attack?

Gunther: Oh, that there were several spies caught and things of this sort.

Marcello: How about landings? Had you heard any rumors about Japanese landings?

Gunther: We heard rumors that the north side of the island was going to be invaded by thousands of Imperial Marines. They were supposed to be 6'5" and all this--bad, real bad guys.

Marcello: What was your colonel's reaction?

Gunther: He didn't think much of it. He said, "Don't believe those rumors. Wait until we get the call."

Marcello: Did you have faith in the colonel's assurances, or in the back of your mind were you thinking about the possibility of an invasion?

Gunther: Well, I was thinking, "He might know what he's talking about, but I've still got to be ready."

Marcello: Yes, because you are how old at this point?

Gunther: I was just past my seventeenth birthday then. The 25th of November was my birthday, and this happened on December 7.

Marcello: You were coming into adulthood pretty fast.

Gunther: I grew up very quickly, especially after we hit Guadalcanal the next year.

Marcello: What did you do that evening of December 7?

Gunther: Well, I had nothing to go to the motor pool for, so I helped the cooks in the mess hall prepare supper.

Marcello: What happened to the colonel?

Gunther: He stayed with us. He stayed in the company that night. The next day, Monday, he took off to the Hawaiian Department, which was down in Honolulu somewhere. I wasn't driving then. I was in the mess hall, oh, for quite a while after that. In fact, we worked all night preparing the next meal, breakfast.

Marcello: Was it safe to walk around that night?

Gunther: No! Definitely not! If you were in uniform, you were safe. But if you were in civilian clothes, you had better let them know who you are. As an example, Mr. Choy, the laundryman, came to the quadrangle, and at each road we had two guards. There are four roads, one on each corner of the quadrangle, Choy came in, and they stopped him because he was Oriental. They wanted to see papers and all kinds of stuff. He couldn't speak English. He was rattling off in his native tongue, and one of the guys shot the headlights out of the car (chuckle). The MP's came and got him and took him off--made him go home or something. It was closed to civilian traffic.

Marcello: Could you hear sporadic firing all night?

Gunther: Yes. There's one thing...let me tell you about this.

Our barracks was only about half-a-mile from the commissary. Around the commissary in the back was a guard. He was walking his duty post. He came upon a large barrel--we later found out--full of rotted onions, cabbages, and vegetables of this sort. He hollered, "Gas!" The whole island within minutes had gas masks on until somebody went up there to tell him what it was. That was amusing, but not at the time (chuckle). I thought, "My God, they're using gas!"

Marcello: But it's another indication of how jumpy everybody was.

Gunther: Yes, yes, everybody was jumpy, trigger-happy more or less.

Marcello: You talked about the Oriental a moment ago, Mr. Choi. This reminded me of something I should have asked you earlier. What measures, if any, were taken there at Schofield before the attack actually to guard against sabotage and things of that nature, keeping in mind that there were a lot of people of Japanese ancestry on the island?

Gunther: I really don't think there was any security measure taken before. Well, gosh, we'd see them every day, and you'd say, "How are you doing, Choi," and all this good stuff. I really don't think there was a whole lot of security, only at the gates. I don't recall seeing any fences around Schofield, you know, to keep people out. Anybody could walk in.

Marcello: What kind of security arrangements were put underway at Schofield after the attack?

Gunther: Very stringent. Most of the companies were put on guard duty. They guarded their own quadrangles and some people were to guard around where there were no fences. In fact, our company was on guard. We would go one platoon at a time. Each platoon would guard a specific area. After several days another company would take our place--relieve us, so to speak.

Marcello: Incidentally, when had the tropical work hours...when had that schedule ceased?

Gunther: That ceased December 7.

Marcello: But you did continue in that situation right up until the attack?

Gunther: Oh, yes, sure.

Marcello: So you were working full-time after the seventh.

Gunther: We worked, period, until we dropped. Not because somebody was hanging over us with a whip. It was because we wanted to get it done.

Marcello: When was it that things then did kind of ease off a little bit?

Gunther: I think a couple months afterwards, but we were all carrying gas masks. Everytime we went to town, we went to town in uniform. We carried a gas mask, steel pot (helmet), and web belt with our bandage pouch. If you had sidearms, you

could go to town with a sidearm.

Marcello: Were changes instituted relative to passes and things of that nature?

Gunther: I believe they were. I think so.

Marcello: When did you finally leave the Hawaiian Islands?

Gunther: That's an easy one. We left on my birthday, 25th of November, 1942.

Marcello: And where were you bound for?

Gunther: We were bound for Guadalcanal. The name of the ship was the Noordham. It was a Dutch ship. It was under Dutch registry. We got about eight hundred miles out, and we were told to turn back--do a 180-degree turn. That was when the Coral Sea Battle was going on. We only had two destroyer escorts. After about seven or eight hours, we did another 180-degree turn and proceeded into Guadalcanal with the 25th Division.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Gunther, I think that's probably a pretty good place to end this interview because we're getting into another portion of World War II. Unfortunately, and rather discouragingly, many of you people have important things to talk about after Pearl Harbor, but since we're only dealing with Pearl Harbor, we'll stop it here.

Gunther: True.

Marcello: I want to thank you very much for having participated in our project. You've said a lot of very interesting and

important things, and I'm sure that students and scholars are going to find your comments most valuable when they get to read this material.

Gunther: Well, it's been my pleasure to contribute my little bit to your research. I hope the students will learn something from it.