

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
NUMBER
641

Interview with
CLARENCE KINDL
MAY 4, 1984

Place of Interview: Norfolk, Virginia
Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello
Terms of Use: Open
Approved: Clarence W. Kindl
(Signature)
Date: 5-4-84

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Oral History Collection

Clarence Kindl

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald Marcello Date of Interview: May 4, 1984

Place of Interview: Norfolk, Virginia

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Clarence Kindl for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 4, 1984, in Norfolk, Virginia. I'm interviewing Mr. Kindl in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was stationed at Wheeler Field as a member of the Army Air Corps during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Kindl, 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. Kindl: I was born in Loyahanna, Pennsylvania, on June 17, 1916. That's an old Indian name. My education is a high school education. During my stay in the Army, I had taken several correspondence courses in administrative work and also in automotive and airplane mechanics.

Dr. Marcello: When did you enter the service?

Mr. Kindl: On June 27, 1940, at Washington, D.C.

Dr. Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the service at that time?

Kindl: Well, in 1940, when I entered the service, things were a little slow everywhere. I had been laid off from my job in Pittsburgh, and I had been down through this area of Norfolk, where I am now, looking for work. We couldn't find anything, so on our way home, we had stopped off in Washington, D.C. We were broke. A friend of mine was with me, and we just walked past the recruiting place. There was the flag hanging out, and we just walked in and said, "I want to join the Air Force, and I want to go to Hawaii." (chuckle)

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

Kindl: The Air Force had been the something that...I always had a liking for airplanes. Every picture that I could get of an airplane, I would cut out. I'd send for--in magazines--all sorts of literature that I could about airplanes. If I would have had the education, I would have liked to have gone further in aviation; but I figured the closest I could get to what I liked was join the Air Force, and I could be around airplanes then. This worked out very well for me.

Marcello: How easy or difficult was it to get into the Army Air Corps in 1940 when you enlisted?

Kindl: It wasn't very difficult to get in the Air Force if you chose to pick at that time what was called foreign service. I wanted to enlist in the Air Force at what at that time was called Bolling Field in Washington, D.C., which is now Dulles

International. There were no openings in the Air Force. The only openings they had was the Air Force Unassigned, Hawaiian Department. So I says, "Well, I'll take that." I was sent to Hawaii for the Air Force, but I was unassigned.

Marcello: You mentioned a moment ago that economics evidently played a role in your decision to join the service. That seems to be one of the standard reasons that influenced many people of your generation to join the service at that particular time.

Kindl: That's true. That's very true. I was out of school in 1936. I graduated from high school in 1936. I had several jobs. I worked in Pittsburg for 37½¢ an hour. Now that was barely living. I was laid off there and couldn't come back home to live. My father had been dead since I was a year-and-a-half old, and I had two other brothers. So I says, "Well, you're out on your own, so you can't go home to Mother because she has no means of support, so here's the next best thing, I guess." But I don't regret it. I don't regret it.

Marcello: Did you go directly from Bolling right over to the Hawaiian Islands?

Kindl: No. First of all, we went up to Fort Slocum, New Rochelle, New York. We got our outfits. We got outfitted in uniforms and everything--the preliminaries--and then were sent down to Fort Jay and Governor's Island, New York, down in Lower Manhattan. We were with the 16th Infantry there. I took my

basic training with the 16th Infantry.

We stayed there until November, and then we went up to Brooklyn Army Base and got aboard the Army troop transport SS Leonard Wood and sailed for Hawaii. I often sit back and think...as we went through the Panama Canal, we were supposed to go to San Francisco. We had some furniture and other equipment on there to be dropped off at the West Coast, and we were to pick up some more people there. But our orders were changed when we came out of the Canal. Instead of to Hawaii, they were going to send us to the Philippines. But for some reason other than that, the orders were changed again, and we went directly to Hawaii. This was 1940, so you can figure that they kind of maybe thought something was in the air at that time even.

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

Kindl: Not very close. No, we weren't...well, you can't say you weren't interested, but we didn't follow up. Of course, there was always scuttlebutt over in Hawaii. There was always this and that, but it was rumors, and you just put that out of your mind. We were in the "Land of Enchantment." Nothing could happen over there (laughter).

Marcello: You mentioned that you had taken your basic training at Fort Slocum in New York. How long did that last?

Kindl: Thirty days. You're in quarantine there basically. You can't

go anywhere. You can't do nothing for one month. You stay right there.

Marcello: I assume that, since basic training only lasted thirty days, you must have had the bare essentials of military etiquette perhaps, such as marching and close-order drill and that sort of thing.

Kindl: That we got with the 16th Infantry. There we got our training. There we marched. I took training which very few other Air Force men had. I took my training with a Springfield rifle and crawled on my stomach under the barbed wire. I know the Air Force don't give you that kind of basic training. But it helped me. It made a better soldier out of me.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you heard that you would be going to the Hawaiian Islands?

Kindl: Oh, I was thrilled. Oh, yes. I couldn't wait. But the disappointing thing...it wasn't too bad...I enlisted with a friend of mine, and, oh, here we were both going to Hawaii, see. Well, he got into some kind of difficulty at home, and he was being taken off of the shipment to Hawaii, and he was assigned to the 16th Infantry. So here I am, going to Hawaii by myself (chuckle). I thought I was going with my buddy, but I wasn't. He went to the 16th Infantry, and consequently he went down in through North Africa. He was wounded at Kasserine Pass and then came back to the States.

Marcello: Okay, so you're aboard the United States Army Transport

Leonard Wood, and you land in Honolulu. What happened at that point?

Kindl: Well, we got in at night. We got into Pearl at night. We walked down the gangplank. I wanted to to to the bomb squadron at Hickam Field. We come down the gangplank, and there was a sergeant standing there saying, "Left, right. Left, right. Wheeler Field, Hickam Field." I said, "I don't want to go to Wheeler." He said, "I didn't ask you." (Chuckle) So that's how I got into the fighter squadron.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit, first of all, about your function at Wheeler Field. What exactly were you doing there? What was your function personally? What kind of work were you doing there?

Kindl: I was first sergeant of the squadron. It was my responsibility...I took my orders from my squadron commander. In the absence of the squadron commander, I was in charge of all of the men. It was up to me to see that they had rations; it was up to me to see that they had the sick call and their payroll and the duties.

Marcello: How long after you got to Wheeler Field did you progress through the ranks? Obviously, when you got there, you were not a first sergeant at that time yet.

Kindl: No. Like the rest of them, I was a private. In about three months, I became a private first class. Then I was drafted to work in the orderly room, and first thing you know, I'm a

sergeant. Of the five years that I spent in there, within two years I am a first sergeant.

Marcello: Was this rather unusual, that is, this rapid promotion?

Kindl: Yes, it was. It was unusual in the Air Force, and it was unusual in our squadron because, as we were sent over to Hawaii, they were activating a new fighter group in the Air Force in Hawaii. That was the 15th Fighter Group. We were the basics. We were sent over there as the nucleus for this 15th Fighter Group. Naturally, the replacements weren't coming in that fast, so there was all kinds of openings in the ranks, and they were filled as you went along. Normally, it's a progressive rate. You go so many years. It's like going up the stairs, you know.

Marcello: So you happened to be at the right place at the right time?

Kindl: At the right time, right.

Marcello: You were there on the ground floor, if I may use that term.

Kindl: Right. We were the ones that started the 15th Fighter Group.

Marcello: So this is what your unit designation was then. You were in the 15th Fighter Group?

Kindl: I was in the 46th Fighter Squadron of the 15th Fighter Group.

Marcello: Go into a little bit more detail on some of the duties that you had there at Wheeler Field during this period prior to the war. Exactly what were you doing?

Kindl: Well, first of all, I worked in the orderly room as a clerk. I did the typing of all of the reports and did the filing.

As I was promoted to first sergeant, it was my responsibility to see that all the needs of the men in the organization was filled and provided for and that all the necessary reports were sent in on time and that the necessary reports were filed. I also saw to it that the men were put on the details that were necessary for them to do, and, also, we had to post guards. The men were rotated, and it was my responsibility to see that all this was done, besides seeing that they got paid.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the physical facilities there at Wheeler Field. For instance, take me on a tour of your living quarters. What were your barracks like?

Kindl: Well, we didn't live in barracks. The barracks that were there were for the people who had been there previous to us--the 18th Fighter Group. They had been there for years, when Wheeler Field was known as Luke Field. Then it was changed over to Wheeler Field. We lived in tents because there was no room for the new people coming in to form the 15th Fighter Group. They were building a 600-man barracks, but it was not completed yet. We lived in tents. We had wooden platforms and pyramidal tents over them. Our office was a tent, also. We had bath facilities. They were permanent there. We had a mess hall. It was an old wooden building with screen around it. Those were our quarters up until the time that we left Wheeler Field.

Marcello: So right up until the time of the attack, you were living in the pyramidal tents there.

Kindl: Living in a pyramidal tent, right.

Marcello: What was the chow like there at Wheeler Field?

Kindl: I could never complain about the chow. I always got my fill, and I didn't think it was that bad. I'd eaten worse (chuckle).

Marcello: I know that in other branches of the service, sports and athletic participation played an important role in the life of the various units. How would this relate to Wheeler Field?

Kindl: Well, first of all, you have to understand one thing. In the Air Force, you quit work at dinnertime. Now you were not permitted to leave the base at noontime. You had to participate in some activities. You could go play ball, play football, pitch horseshoes, or do what you want to do...go bowling or whatever. You were not allowed to leave the base. You could go after six o'clock. Then you could leave the base. It seemed that only the necessary flying or training of officers was done in the afternoon.

Most of the work was done in the morning. The fellows got up and went down on the line and got the planes ready that were scheduled for flying and did what repairs had to be made on the planes in the hangars and so on. At noontime, after you had your lunch, why, that was a relaxation time. There was nothing really done in the afternoons.

Marcello: So you were on what are commonly referred to as tropical work

hours?

Kindl: Right (laughter). Like in Mexico--siesta time.

Marcello: I do know that in some instances, units would actually go out and recruit athletes for the football team or the basketball team or the baseball team and so on. That much emphasis was placed on athletics in some units. Was that ever the case here at Wheeler Field? Do you recall?

Kindl: No. Actually, at Wheeler Field there was no competitive sports amongst squadrons. We didn't get into competitive sports in that relation until after the war started, and then we had a softball team. We were fortunate. We had a fellow from...I believe he was about 6'6". He was a professional softball pitcher. The 46th Squadron team beat the coast artillery, the infantry, and everybody else that was on the island where we were stationed.

And we had a basketball team. Basketball was great before the war. That was one of the things that they did stress. The 46th Squadron had a basketball team--a very good one, too. To play basketball we had to go up to Schofield Barracks, which Wheeler Field was next to. Schofield Barracks was an infantry base. We didn't have a gymnasium or anything at Wheeler Field. All you had were airplane hangars and housing facilities. There was no recreation facilities of that type.

Marcello: Did you adjust pretty easily to living in these tents during

this period while you were there at Wheeling Field?

Kindl: Well, yes, because when I left Fort Slocum for Fort Jay, we lived in tents in Fort Jay for...well, from July...let's see...August, September, October...we lived in tents for three months. So when we got over there, we were pretty adjusted to living in tents.

Marcello: So you didn't know any better.

Kindl: No (laughter). Tent living wasn't too bad, really.

Marcello: You answered in part the question I was going to ask. I was going to ask you exactly where Wheeler Field was located, and I think you did mention that it was adjacent to or very close to Schofield Barracks.

Kindl: Right.

Marcello: What exactly was its function? What exactly was the responsibilities of Wheeler Field?

Kindl: Wheeler Field was the fighter base--the only fighter base on the island at that time. Naturally, the fighters were there for the protection of the Navy ships in Pearl Harbor. That was the primary purpose of Wheeler Field--for the fighter squadron.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the liberty routine for you and your buddies there at Wheeler Field. How did it work for you? How often could you get liberty or passes?

Kindl: You could leave the base every evening at six o'clock and be back at six o'clock in the morning. You could leave

Saturday at noon and be back at six o'clock on Monday morning. That was your Class A pass. If you wanted a three-day pass, you had to apply for that separately.

Liberty was very, very lenient. There was no problems in getting off the base. You had your Class A pass, and that permitted you to leave during the evening hours and come back in the morning hours. As long as you were there to report for reveille in the morning, you were okay.

Marcello: Where did you normally go when you had liberty?

Kindl: Well, we'd go to Honolulu. We'd go to downtown Honolulu.

Marcello: How far away was Honolulu?

Kindl: Honolulu was about thirty miles from Wheeler Field.

Marcello: How would you get there?

Kindl: A taxicab. For 50¢ we'd load up a taxicab. It would cost 50¢. Everybody would pitch in.

Marcello: When you went on liberty in Honolulu, what was your normal routine? What would you do?

Kindl: Well, the first thing, we'd go down and find a good restaurant, have a good meal, and then go around to the different pubs and have a drink here and have a drink there and socialize with the...every place had entertainment at that time. There was some sort of entertainment. Then later on, if there was five of us, we rented a cottage down in Honolulu. It was cheaper that way than paying for a hotel. We'd pay by the month. Five guys would pitch in, and we had a place to sleep--

down on the beach most of the time.

Marcello: Of what significance was Hotel Street so far as the service was concerned?

Kindl: Hotel Street was something like the Strip in Las Vegas (chuckle). That's where all the action was. There was one tavern after another. That seems like that's all that was there. Also, there were the houses of prostitution, which were legal at that time in Hawaii. There was theaters and restaurants. It seemed like everything congregated on one street. It made it easier.

Marcello: I guess it also made it easier for a serviceman to part with his money since everything was on the same street.

Kindl: Very easy. Very easy. That's true. You know, servicemen only went down...if he went on a weekend, it was on payday. You have to understand that we were making \$21 a month then, and after they took out what you had bought on credit, so to speak, you had to say, "Well, I got so much that I can go downtown and have a few drinks and have something to eat. That's it, and then it's back home." Of course, then after a while they raised the wages a little bit, and if you got a promotion, why, then you got a couple extra bucks.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you had rented this cottage. I also recall that there really weren't very many hotels in Honolulu, were there, at that time? Certainly not along Waikiki Beach.

Kindl: I can remember the Royal Hawaiian. Of course, that's a figurehead of a thing down there now. Right downtown was the Alexander P. Young.

Marcello: The Moana was in there.

Kindl: The Moana. The Halekulani and the Moana. The Moana was the farthest one up. Actually, there weren't motels like you find today. This was it, as far as places to stay. You could always find rooming houses where people rented rooms to the servicemen. Then there was the YMCA. If you couldn't find anyplace to stay, then you could always get a room in the YMCA. But most of the times it was filled up with sailors, so the Army guys didn't have much of a chance unless you got in there before the liberty boats came in.

Marcello: I've heard it said that a lot of the Army and Air Corps personnel would kind of avoid downtown Honolulu on weekends because there would be so many sailors in.

Kindl: That's true. You see, the sailor wasn't allowed to go downtown..he wasn't allowed to leave the ship in civilian clothes. Now we wouldn't go downtown in uniform. We always went in civilian clothes. If we had a car...to operate a car on the base, you had to have what they called a sector plate, and that gave you permission to get on the base with that car. This plate was numbered, and it would say "Air Force," and that was attached to your license plate. So the fellows who would go downtown would take that sector plate off before they went downtown because some of the local boys didn't appreciate

the GIs coming down there and invading their territory, so to speak. So to make things easier, we went in civilian clothes. At that time there were so many civil servants--government workers--in Pearl there that you didn't know if they were service people or not. You mingled with the rest of them.

Marcello: What was there to do on the base itself, assuming you didn't want to go downtown in the evening or on a weekend?

Kindl: Well, they had a small PX there. There was a soda fountain, and they sold beer. But we normally went...the reason there weren't so many facilities on Wheeler is that we were so close to Schofield. Schofield had a big theater. Schofield had a roller skating rink. They had bowling alleys. They had a huge library. Everything was up there. Each outfit up there, like the 35th, the 27th, they all had their own beer tavern, so to speak. It wasn't a problem of finding entertainment or something to do on the base. Like I said, Schofield wasn't that far away. We could walk up there in ten minutes or so. They had an arena where they promoted...boxing was great at that time. There was a lot of good boxing. In downtown Honolulu they had collegiate-type wrestling, not this that you see today--these big guys throwing one another around. They used collegiate wrestlers. There was theaters on the base. Most of the time, that's what you did if you didn't leave.

We'd walk over sometime to Wahiawa, which out the back gate of Wheeler Field took only fifteen or twenty minutes to walk down the road. There was an outside roller skating rink there, and that's all that was in Wahiawa other than normal places that you go to have something to eat or drink, and that's it.

Marcello: Wahiawa was simply a town that was close, and its basic function was to serve the military, in effect. It lived off the military.

Kindl: It lived off of the military, sure, because it couldn't survive on the people that lived in the area there. Sure, it survived off of the Air Force and Schofield Barracks.

Marcello: Now as one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the two countries continued to get worse, could you detect any changes in your routine there at Wheeler Field?

Kindl: Well, each squadron would go on gunnery practice. They would go for one month out of the year. We'd go on gunnery practice. We'd leave Wheeler Field, and we would go down the coast about thirty miles to a small airstrip there on the grass. It was called Mokleia. There we would set up camp. Our officer would stay there, and we'd have all our planes. They would go out on gunnery practice everyday. Everyday we'd go out for gunnery practice. The first thing you know, we'd get an order to put machine guns up around

the airstrip. Then next week we'd get another order: "Be aware for alert. Outfit is going on alert. Set up floodlights all along the airstrip. The airplanes were all lined up in a row, and we'd set up floodlights to shine on them from the highway, and we patrolled that at night. Normally, we stayed for a month on gunnery practice. We got orders, after we were there for a little over two weeks, to pack up and go back to Wheeler. We got the orders on Saturday.

Marcello: On December 6?

Kindl: Yes. We got the orders on Saturday to go back. There was thirty-some fighter planes all loaded up with gas and ammunition. The guns were loaded and everything. I says, "Well, hell, it's easy. You fly them planes back." They said, "No. You unload the ammunition, put it in the trucks, and haul the ammunition back. Then take the planes back into Wheeler Field." So the ammunition set on the trucks there, and the airplanes were put in the revetments, and some were set out in front of the hangars, and that's the way it was the next morning.

Marcello: I do know that one of the concerns of the Army was how to deal with potential saboteurs, since there were so many people of Japanese ancestry on the islands. What anti-sabotage measures do you recall being put into effect at Wheeler Field? For instance, you mentioned awhile ago that the airplanes were lined up occasionally in the straight

rows, and I've read that this was one of the ways that they felt that they could be guarded against saboteurs. They were easier to guard that way.

Kindl: Then we built revetments. Each plane was put into a revetment. Now this was to prevent...if they were lined up in a row and something did happen to one, they would all go. This way they were separated. This became a factor on December 7. Those planes were in those revetments.

Marcello: So the planes at Wheeler Field were not lined up in nice, neat rows on December 7?

Kindl: No, not ours. Not from the 46th Squadron. The 46th Squadron's were in revetments.

Marcello: Do you recall that around this time there also seemed to be an influx of new personnel? In other words, was the base building up? Was it receiving more and more personnel?

Kindl: Oh, yes. New recruits were coming in from the Midwest, from Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. We got maybe four or five hundred of them. As they came in, you had the 47th Squadron and the 45th Squadron and the 72nd Squadron and the 78th Squadron. It was all new squadrons being formed as these people came, and the airplanes became available.

This was the thing--the airplanes. You have to figure out, and you have to look at it this way. Previous to December 7, 1941, we had airplanes that were P-36's. They had come from Selfridge Field, Michigan. They didn't want them anymore,

so they sent them over here. They got new ones. We got the old ones. We had no P-40's. They only started coming in shortly before the war, and we only had a few of them on the field. We had some what was called P-26. Now that's a single wing with wire struts from the wings, and they had a fixed machine gun on each one of those wheels. No retractable gear or anything else. That was the sole protection or the armament--those two .30-caliber machine guns. When December 7 came, we had P-36's and about two or three P-40's on the field.

Marcello: So most of the aircraft that you had there by December 7 were mostly obsolescent aircraft.

Kindl: They were. They were vintage. They were obsolete, yes.

Marcello: How did this rapid influx of new personnel affect the routine of things there on Wheeler Field? I mean, from what you said previously in the interview, it seems like you had a pretty good life there at Wheeler.

Kindl: Oh, yes. Things were shaping up pretty good, but as we got more people on the field, then we were put into training. Then they started calisthenics every morning. You got up for calisthenics. You got on a routine then, see. It wasn't anymore, well, just "come as you go." You had inspection every Saturday morning. You passed in review a couple of times a week. You went out, and you marched. You took close-order drill. Things started to working together in order to get

better control of everything. It seemed before that everybody was on their own. We were getting to be a closer-knit group.

Marcello: So it appears as if the holiday routine was being dropped, and the base took on a more military role.

Kindl: (Chuckle) More military role, right. Passes became harder to get. You didn't have so much free time. More people were being put to work doing different things. We were getting newer equipment coming in. We were getting new pilots. We were stepping up the training. The training of the new pilots was going on in the morning and in the afternoon, where previously it was just in the morning. We were getting more pilots, so there was also more personnel needed down on the line to maintain the aircraft around-the-clock, so to speak.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit more about that gunnery practice and that alert prior to the actual attack itself because that brings us into that period just before the attack. You mentioned that the whole unit moved down to this beach area? Where was it located?

Kindl: It was about thirty miles from Wheeler, and it was a grassy field. It was called Mokeleia. It was nothing but a grassy strip. We set up our camp there, so to speak.

Marcello: You were acting primarily as the support personnel for the fighters and so on? Your unit or your group was acting as support personnel for the fighters and so on?

Kindl: Well, we were the only fighter group--outside of the Navy,

which had the planes at Ewa, and the Marines, which had them at Ford Island. The 15th Fighter Group was the only fighter group designated in the Hawaiian Department at that time.

Marcello: I guess what I'm saying is, your particular function out there was to...the primary reason for going out there was to provide gunnery practice for the fighters and so on?

Kindl: For the pilots, right.

Marcello: And the function of you and the people in your group was more or less that of a support role, was it not?

Kindl: Well, sure. We had to maintain the aircraft. We had to see that the radios were okay and the engines were okay and the planes were loaded with gasoline and the planes were loaded with ammunition. They were checked out all the time. When you're on alert, then the crew chief has to stay with the airplane around-the-clock, and every half-hour he has to start that aircraft up so it's warm and ready to go if necessary. You know, you can't start up...it's just like in the wintertime with a cold car--just sit there and let it warm up. You couldn't afford to do that if you had to get off in a hurry. That aircraft had to be ready to go.

Marcello: And your specific function was more or less in the administrative end at this time, correct?

Kindl: Right.

Marcello: You mentioned that this alert was called off or stopped short, so to speak--this gunnery practice.

Kindl: Right.

Marcello: Pick up the story from that point then. And this was on Saturday, December 6.

Kindl: Right. Well, we went back to the base. Of course, you know, the guys were a little disgruntled because they had to work on Saturday again. But that was okay. Things passed by.

Marcello: What did you do that Saturday evening?

Kindl: Well, most of the guys were so tired and everything that they just sacked out because it was late by the time we got everything stowed away, the aircraft set in their revetments where they were supposed to be, and things put away and you got your gear unpacked and everything. We just sat around and had a couple of beers and "BSed" and went to bed.

Marcello: As relations between the two countries continued to get worse, did you and your buddies in your bull sessions ever talk about the possibility of a Japanese attack in the Hawaiian Islands?

Kindl: Never. That was the farthest thing from our minds--never. We were more concerned about sabotage. Never were we worried about...well, I won't say we weren't worried, but never did we think about that they would come in as they did. We was always worried that somebody was going to come in and destroy the airplanes or something. It seemed like that was the only target they were after--the airplanes. It wasn't bothering the men or anything else.

Marcello: Were the guard details around the perimeter of the base and so on increased or stepped up as relations between the two countries got worse?

Kindl: Not really. It was normal that everyday you posted so many men for guard duty. You had a sergeant-of-the-guard and so many guards. Everyone had a post. The officer-of-the-day checked those posts every so many hours to see that the people that were assigned to those posts were doing what they were supposed to do. This was normal procedure at all times. It had not increased. We had not on our base increased this to anything out of the ordinary. We still used the same number of people in the same places.

Marcello: So did you go to bed at a reasonable time that Saturday evening?

Kindl: Yes. We were in bed before midnight.

Marcello: What plans did you have for the next day?

Kindl: Go to church on Sunday morning. Go to church. We figured, if it was a nice day, we'd probably go down to the beach-- go downtown and go to the beach. But we came back from church and...

Marcello: Okay, so this brings us into that Sunday morning of December 7, 1941, and I want you to give me a blow-by-blow account of what happened as things took place. What time did you get up?

Kindl: We got up about six o'clock, and we went directly to church.

Marcello: Could you sack in on Sunday mornings if you wanted to?

Kindl: Oh, you could sleep all day Sunday if you wanted to, yes. Nobody said anything to you. You didn't have to go to the mess hall if you didn't want to. You could go down to the cafeteria and buy your lunch or dinner or breakfast or whatever.

We'd gone to church that morning, and after church we started walking up toward the tents we were living in. We decided that maybe we would take a chance and go up to the mess hall and see if there was anything left over from breakfast yet. There was the possibility that we might get something because breakfast was at a certain hour, and we were just getting on the tail end of that. Being that it was Sunday, there wasn't that many guys up there.

The mess hall was a wooden building--one-story with screen around it. It was made like a U-shape. Two sides had dining areas, and across the back was the kitchen. There was rows of tables on each side, and we sat down in there. There must have been no more than ten or fifteen fellows in there who came up for late chow, as we called it. We were sitting on one side, and some fellows were sitting over here (gesture), and the KP was cleaning up. He says, "Hey, fellows, how about getting all on one side so I can clean this area here." So we moved over, and we all sat at one table.

(We hadn't even gotten anything to eat yet, and we heard

this explosion. We looked at one another. I said, "There's no flying today. It can't be an airplane. Maybe it was a gas tank." They were fueling airplanes, so I says, "Maybe they had an explosion." So here I heard another one--explosion. In the meantime, I walked over to the screen, and I looked out, and I could see a Japanese plane.

Marcello: Did you recognize it as a Japanese plane?

Kindl: I recognized it right away. I can see that thing today. That rising sun on there looked like a full moon at night shining down there (chuckle)

Marcello: Describe what you saw in terms of how high it was flying and all this sort of thing.

Kindl: Well, it was flying, I would say, at no more than a thousand feet. He had completed a bomb drop. These bombers were dropping 500-pound bombs. He'd completed this bomb drop, and he was pulling out and leveling off when I saw him.

Where we had been sitting...if we would have stayed there, I probably wouldn't be sitting here today talking to you because one plane came down and strafed that area. He went from one end of that mess hall to the other and shot up every table. There was nobody sitting there. We were on the other side.

So then the next bomb hit. The mess hall was right at kind of a crossroads. It was sitting right on a corner. One bomb dropped directly in the center of that crossroads.

It knocked out the tailor shop and the shoe shop and the PX, and the back end...by that time we started moving out of the mess hall. The whole back end of the mess hall caved in--all of the pots and pans and everything. That's the way that we ran out because the bomb had fallen over here (gesture), and we ran out the back. There was a small PX there--a small post exchange there--it was already burning.

We had civilian clothes on. We'd come from church. We're dressed up. Somebody says, "What do we do?" I says, "The first thing we better do is get down to the hangar. That's the first place to go. Get down to the hangar.

So on the way down, I saw an ambulance already coming into the small dispensary that we had on Wheeler. The big hospital was up at Schofield Barracks. They were already unloading wounded out of that into the dispensary--those who weren't wounded too bad. We had one...I'll never forget him--Donald Plant. He was from Michigan. Donald Plant was on guard duty at our hangar. As I got down, somebody told me that Donald Plant was killed. He was shot by a Japanese machine gun while he was on guard duty.

There was no use going into the hangar because we didn't have any airplanes in there because they were all out on hangar line.

Marcello: What did you see when you went down to the hangars?

Kindl: Well, the first explosion that we heard...and I saw then what

happened. That first explosion hit a hangar. Now the hangars were double. They were made like two loaves of bread sitting side-by-side. There was this base, and there were two, four, six, eight of those. Well, this hangar already was burning. The roof was gone on it. You couldn't get in it because of the...we tried to get in to get our armament. Our guns and everything were in the armament room in the hangar. We couldn't get near them because the tar was melting on the roof from the fire, and it was falling down just like rain inside.

The airplanes that had belonged to the other squadron were sitting in there, and they were already burning. Gas tanks were exploding, and ammunition was flying up. So the fellows got out of there, and we went next door to the other hangar, and we knocked open some boxes of .45 pistols. But I says, "What good are these? They're all in cosmoline. It would take two or three hours to clean the cosmoline off before you can even use them. Forget it. That's no good to you anyhow."

Marcello: How many people are in this group with you?

Kindl: There was about five of us that had gone down. In the meantime, on our way down to the hangar, we were picking up more of the fellows that were in the tents, and they came running. Everybody's idea was to...it didn't matter what your job was, it was to try to get to the airplanes and get the airplanes ready. If possible, we wanted to get some in the air. Like I said, fortunately our planes...some of our mechanics would

get an airplane ready. They would have it gassed up and everything, and here would come another wave of Jap planes. So they'd run over to the other side of the revetment. They'd shoot that plane, and that plane would burn up. So the guys would come over to the back side again. We'd go get another one--try to get another one ready. We had pilots there. The pilots were waiting, but there was no airplanes because we had to get them gassed up and had to get ammunition in them and get them ready.

Marcello: Oh, that's correct. You mentioned previously in the interview that in the case of your planes, the armament and so on had been removed.

Kindl: The ammunition was removed, yes. They had to have ammunition put back in them.

Marcello: You seemed to be implying a moment ago that even in the revetment those planes weren't safe, that is, the Japanese were hitting them when they were in these revetments.

Kindl: Sure, because the revetments...they would come in on the front, right? They would come in on the front and start strafing and go up, and then they'd turn around; and as they made the sweep up, then the rear gunner...the Japanese bombers had the rear gunner, and then he had his chance at you. So it was run up on this side and then run back down on that side.

We managed to get four planes in the air. Our squadron

commander at that time was a young first lieutenant, Louis M. Sanders. You've probably heard of Louis M. Sanders. He's now a retired colonel living in Alabama. I was down to visit him last year. He was a very, very nice gentleman. If you had to pick somebody to be a leader of your squadron, you'd pick a man like that.

Marcello: What kind of planes were left to fly off there?

Kindl: Four P-36's. He had three other pilots--Lieutenant Rasmussen, Lieutenant Spain, and I think it was O'Neal. He had picked these because they were the older and more experienced of the pilots that we had. One of the pilots went back to get a different chute because the one didn't fit him. In the meantime, here's a young pilot. He's a rookie. He sees this open airplane. The flight leader, squadron commander, Lieutenant Sanders in his plane. Rasmussen in his plane. They're all warmed up. They're ready to go. Lieutenant Sterling was the officer that's standing there. Lieutenant Sterling takes his wristwatch off and gives it to one of the fellows there. He says, "Give this to my mother. I'm not coming back." He got in that plane. When I talked to Colonel Sanders later, he said, "I looked over there and saw him, and there was nothing I could do. We were taking off. I had to watch over him." When they got airborne, they went over and engaged some Japanese. He says that he saw Lieutenant Rasmussen being shot down, and he shot down the Jap that was on the tail of...

that shot down Sterling. He felt so bad about it because he had no control over it at the time. He did not want Sterling to go because he didn't have the experience. Well, he was a pilot, and he said, "Hell, I'm going to fly. Here's my chance." So he got in, and he took off with them.

Marcello: Meanwhile, back on the field itself, how would you describe the situation? In other words, is there order? Chaos? Confusion? Fear? Or is there a combination of all these things?

Kindl: At first--I'll be the first one to admit it--at first there was the feeling of fear. You really didn't know. When it hit you and you realized what was happening, then your training came into effect. Then you say, "Where is my first place to go?" It wasn't to look for the protection of yourself because I saw lots and lots of people out in the open and not because they were confused and didn't know where they were going. They had a place to get to, and they were going. They were disregarding what was happening above them or anything else. They were going down to do their job. I think that, after the initial shock of it was over, there was more anger than anything. There was anger. They were just determined as hell that they were going to turn this whole thing about.

Marcello: What were you personally doing out there around the revetments while the attack was going on?

Kindl: Well, I was helping the fellows the best that I could--hauling

ammunition. A guy would get the tug and hook on the thing-- the trailer behind it--and load it. We were passing ammunition and...wherever you were needed. Like I say, at that time nobody says, "You can't do that. That's not your job. It didn't matter what job you had. There was no use in me going to the orderly room. They didn't need me in the orderly room. There was nothing in the orderly room. They needed hands down on the line down there. If there was any way I could help...we tried to get some of the planes out that were in the hangars. We were trying to push planes out.

When they'd start strafing again, what did you do? You wasn't going to stand out in the open. Naturally, everybody ducked for cover the best you could. As soon as they went by, you went back to doing the job you were doing before. I felt sorry for a lot of those guys. They had this nice airplane all ready to go, and they'd come down and strafe it and blow it up. It was gone just like that. There was nothing.

Marcello: We talked about these revetments awhile ago. How were they constructed--of what materials and so on?

Kindl: Well, they were earthen. They were just like U-shaped. They were banked up on one side and down here. They were about thirty or forty feet high. They completely covered...if you looked down the side, you couldn't see the airplane. The only way you could see was in front of them.

Marcello: Did they have some sort of a roof over the top of them?

Kindl: Nothing. Nothing over the top. Like I said, if something happened to one, they weren't all going to catch on fire.

Marcello: Did you personally come under any of this bombing or strafing?

Kindl: Oh, yes. Yes, I got a big piece of shrapnel at home that went right through my tent and my footlocker when I went back up to the orderly room--when they come back the second time. I have a piece of shrapnel about that big (gesture), and it went down through the tent and into the footlocker.

Marcello: What emotions or feelings did you have when you were directly under some of this bombing or strafing?

Kindl: Well, you know, it's hard to tell. First of all, you were scared. Like I said before, I'll be the first one to admit that I was scared. You didn't know where the...when the next one comes down, is it going to get you? If another stray bullet is going to come or if they were going to strafe...there were so many airplanes in the air. They were flying all around one way or the other. There was so much running around down on the airfield.

The hangars were burning. This was a big concern. The hangars were all on fire. They were throwing up black smoke, and gas was exploding. Ammunition was going off. There was as much chance of getting wounded by the exploding ammunition and gas down on the ground as it was for a Jap plane to come down and do you some damage. I was scared.

Marcello: You mentioned that there seemed to be a lull between the first

attack and the second attack.

Kindl: Right.

Marcello: What did you do during the lull?

Kindl: Well, we tried to kind of regroup and see what we had left, what could be salvaged, what could we put into use. Then we started looking for something for ourself--some kind of protection for ourself. Then is when we started to see what machine guns...some of the fellows just took the old aircraft guns without any tripod or anything and said that they'd use them if they had to. We didn't have any rifles. The Air Force didn't have that kind of training with the rifles. There was no rifles available. The only thing that you had was a .45-caliber pistol and what armament that you could find around the hangars that wasn't being used on the airplanes.

Marcello: Did you see anybody shooting at these planes with .45-caliber pistols and so on?

Kindl: I saw them shooting (chuckle) with pistols, and I saw them shooting with rifles--those who had them that were on guard. There were a certain amount of rifles that were used for guard duty. These guys were shooting with these old Springfields--.30-06 Springfields. I guess it was just out of frustration more than anything else. I don't think that they hoped or knew that they were going to do any damage. It was just something that they had to do because they had the weapon on hand and said, "Maybe I'll get a lucky shot." I'll tell you,

they flew so low that when they'd come in strafing, you could see that rear gunner sitting there, and he had the whole field to himself.

Marcello: Obviously, during that first wave, they must have been using dive-bombers. Is that correct?

Kindl: They were using dive-bombers, right.

Marcello: You mentioned that you could see the gunner in the back of the plane. Describe what you saw. What did he look like in terms of appearance?

Kindl: Well, they all wore what we called high-altitude flying suits. It was sheepskin leather with a big collar. They wore the leather helmet with the strap underneath and the real big goggles. There he was. He looked like a big hulk sitting in the back there with all this high-flying equipment on, which is very bulky, and big gauntlet gloves on. This is all you can see of him sticking out of the cockpit.

Marcello: In other words, you could see him from the waist up or from the chest up.

Kindl: The waist up. That's it. You could follow the bombs. When they'd drop a bomb, you could just follow and see where it was going to land. If it was coming anywhere near where you were, you'd better hurry and find...where was you going to go? There was no place. I saw a guy crawl in a storm sewer (chuckle). There was no place to go.

Marcello: There was a second wave. Did the second wave affect Wheeler Field? Did they come over Wheeler Field with bombers?

- Kindl: No, they came over strafing. That was strictly strafing. They came in, and they shot up everything that they could. As I said, there was no opposition. There was no opposition.
- Marcello: Now by the time the second wave comes in and does this strafing, are officers arriving and taking charge and getting things kind of organized?
- Kindl: Most of our officers were available. They were on the base at that time. We had quite a few officers that were single. They were young fellows that came from the States over to Hawaii. They lived in the what you called the Bachelor Officers' Quarters, so they were on the base then. They all came down: "Okay, you're going to organize this. You see what you can salvage. You check and see what airplanes are available. You check and see how much gas is available. You check personnel. See what key personnel we have left," and so on. They were pretty efficient in that respect. Their training as an officer seemed to come into use at that time. They were able to organize and keep the confusion down. If everybody had something to do, it was a lot better than trying to run around and not knowing what you're doing.
- Marcello: What did you do that afternoon? We're assuming that the attack is now completed.
- Kindl: Well, that afternoon we went into the orderly room, and we sat down there and talked: "What are we going to do?" Now we have no airplanes. Well, we got a couple." I think we

had four or five good ones out of approximately twenty-five or thirty. "Now what are we going to do as far as the men are concerned? We've got to set up some kind of emergency station here."

All communications have to go in and out of this orderly room from headquarters. Well, right away we were given cipher devices for decoding messages. Everyday the password was changed. All communications that came down from headquarters had to go through the orderly room and then had to go down on to the line where the commanding officer had set up quarters with his officers close to the airplanes. They lived right near them--stayed near. It was our business, then, to coordinate all of the messages and information--everything between headquarters, the orderly room, and the line.

Marcello: Did you do that most of the afternoon and into the evening?

Kindl: Into the evening. As a matter of fact, we slept right in the orderly room there, fully clothed, that day and the next day, and I'm still in civilian clothes with sport pants and a shirt on. I was not even in military uniform yet.

Marcello: Are you armed by this time?

Kindl: By that time I have the .45 cleaned up, and I slept with that (laughter). We were issued a gas mask. Everybody was issued a gas mask, helmet, first aid kit, and so on. You were told to stay. Where you were put was where you were to stay. You didn't go wandering around at night because there

were too many trigger-happy people. It was terrible to go out at night if you didn't know the password or somebody else challenged you. You had to be on your alert at all times.

This frustrated me to a point because I used to have to go from the orderly room out maybe half a mile...I'd have to go out to the line to the commanding officer's post, and I had to pass all these check points. I got challenged about every block, which was okay--was right. But in the dead of the night, all lights out, and no vehicles moving, if you're walking and somebody says, "Halt! Who goes there," boy, you better say the password right away and don't stumble on it because you might not have a second chance.

Marcello: Was the orderly room operating under blacked-out conditions?

Kindl: Blackout conditions. Everything was enclosed with canvas, and we worked with shaded lights. We had double doors. If anybody went in or out, you went through this one before you opened that one so you wouldn't cast no light. That was a normal precaution at the time. The next day or so, things kind of eased up in that respect. You kind of got to know where you were and what you were going to do.

We were only on Wheeler Field a couple of days, and then we were sent off. We went down to the Ewa Marine Base. The Marines had SPD dive-bombers on there, and they lost about eighty of them. They were part of the protection for Pearl Harbor--the Marines. So they had no aircraft. The only thing

that was flyable was about four planes from the 46th Squadron, so they moved us down to the Ewa Marine Base, and we stayed down there with four airplanes. We slept on the gymnasium floor on mattresses and blankets and ate with the Marines. We stayed there for a month, until they got organized a little bit and got some airplanes built and back up together again and were able to protect themselves more or less. Then we went back up to Wheeler Field.

Marcello: What rumors were going around the orderly room that evening of December 7?

Kindl: Oh, God! The Japanese had landed on this point; the Japanese had invaded over here; the Japanese troops were out there; there was going to be another bombing; they were coming in again. There was rumors after rumors. You didn't know who to believe, and, of course, you didn't believe any of them unless they came from the proper source.

Marcello: Did you get much sleep that night?

Kindl: Off and on. We'd sleep in shifts if we could. But you were so keyed up that you couldn't. Sleep didn't come. You could stay awake all night. And you was drinking coffee. I had coffee, coffee, coffee. Actually, you were afraid to go to sleep because you didn't know what was going to happen that night. The daytime didn't matter so much. You wasn't too concerned in the daytime because you could see what was going on around you, but as nighttime came, there was a different

picture of the whole thing. You became worried. You'd think, "I wonder if they're going to come in." "How are they going to come in?" "If they're going to come in...." I think that the Japanese realized themselves, to this day even, that their high command underestimated the forces and defense in the Hawaiian Islands. If they were prepared to make an invasion, that would have been the time to invade because they would have got very little opposition.

Marcello: When did you have a chance to communicate in some fashion with your mother to let her know that you were okay? And how did you communicate with her?

Kindl: It was about, oh, I'd say, at least a month before I got a letter out to her.

Marcello: You were not allowed to send back any pre-printed cards or anything like that in the meantime?

Kindl: Nothing, no. Nothing. We weren't allowed to send nothing. Everything right there was censored. Right there everything was censored. We were allowed to send a letter...now I understand that some of them had, like, a card that said, "I'm okay. I'll write to you later," so on and so forth like that.

Marcello: But you didn't have anything like that?

Kindl: No, we didn't have anything like that. After we got a letter ...it was about a month. I'll tell you, we were so busy moving around...like, after we got cleaned up on Wheeler, got the things in some sense of order, then we went to Ewa. We

had to get set up down there on Ewa, and after we were there for a while, it was break down and go back to Wheeler Field again. So in the meantime, we tried to write, but things going back and forth to the States were slow--the mail and this and that--so it was about a month after that that they found out that I was okay. But I didn't get back to the States for four years.

Marcello: Earlier in the interview, we talked about the fears of sabotage. During that night of December 7, did the thought of saboteurs cross the minds of you and your buddies?

Kindl: Oh, definitely. Oh, definitely, because previous to this, there was all kinds of talk of saboteurs. Then you heard the rumors that they cut the arrows in the cane fields and so on like that.

Marcello: That they had cut the arrows in the cane fields to show the planes the proper direction?

Kindl: Arrows in the cane field, yes. It would take them a hell of a long time to cut an arrow in a cane field, if you know what a sugar cane field is like.

But one thing that they did find was numerous radio transmitting units that were capable of transmitting messages to any part of the country. As a matter of fact, one of the biggest ones was at the upper end of Schofield Barracks near Kole Kole Pass. There was a tavern there, and after the war started it closed just like that because that was a...later

they found out it was a point where they were sending... let's fact it, they were sending messages back and forth all the time. That's no secret. Sure, there was sabotage, but security was tightened up on the field, and we wasn't worried that that much sabotage could be done. Maybe they would put one plane out of commission or something, but they couldn't come in and sabotage the whole thing and say that the airfield is out of order, that they can't function. Everything wasn't concentrated in one place like that for them to do that.

Marcello: We mentioned earlier that the Army Air Corps was in the process of changing. After Pearl Harbor that old Army Air Corps had more or less disappeared, is that correct?

Kindl: Right, right.

Marcello: When did you finally leave the Hawaiian Islands?

Kindl: I left Hawaii in 1944.

Marcello: So you remained there for a large portion of the war?

Kindl: Yes. We left Wheeler, and then we were sent over to the big island of Hawaii. We took over the civilian airport over there at the big island of Hawaii. From there we were sent to Canton Island, about 2,200 miles south of the Hawaiian Islands and right below the equator. That was a hell hole (chuckle) --no trees, no freshwater, no grass. Then we left there and went up to the Marshalls and Gilberts. We went to Makin Island in the Marshalls and Gilberts. From Makin Island... of course, in the meantime, we'd hop back to Hawaii for, like,

kind of a reorganization--new airplanes, some new personnel, a new assignment--and then we'd be off again.

There was always new training. We had fighter pilots come right out of Kelley Field in Texas, right out of school, and sent over to Hawaii and expected to fly a P-38 Lightning, which they didn't know anything about and never seen one. So it was continuous training and training of new personnel and new aircraft.

We'd come back up to Wheeler Field, and the 46th was scheduled to be part of the new fighter group that was forming, called the 318th Fighter Group, which was being formed at Bellows Field. They were scheduled to start down in the South Pacific for island hopping. They were taken out of the 15th Fighter Group and not put in the 318th. They were put in the 21st Fighter Group, and it was part of the 21st Fighter Group and the 15th Fighter Group that landed on Iwo Jima. We had P-51 Mustangs--the latest thing out for the U.S. Air Force--but that wasn't the newest airplane. Russians had them; England had them. Everybody had them before the United States had them. They were designed primarily for a long-range fighter, and they were very valuable in support of the B-29's that were bombing Tokyo. Our 15th Fighter Group has a unit citation as being the first fighter group to escort a B-29 over Tokyo.

Marcello: Where were you when the war ended?

Kindl: When the war ended? In the Pacific. When the war ended in the Pacific, I was discharged. I was discharged on July 13, 1945.

Marcello: So you had actually been discharged just a little bit before the war was actually over.

Kindl: Right.

Marcello: Well, I guess that's probably a good place to end this interview, Mr. Kindl. I want to thank you very much for having talked with me. You've said some very interesting and important things.

Kindl: Well, I hope that what we have discussed here and what has transpired can be of some importance to somebody down the line. I like the idea of what you have said here to me, that in the future to come somebody may get something out of this.