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J O H N S A C K E R
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Place of Interview: Temple, Texas

Interviewer: Thomas Young

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Approved: *John R. Sacker*
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

John Sacker

Interviewer: Thomas Young

Date: February 24, 1989

Place of Interview: Temple, Texas

Mr. Young: This is Thomas Young. I am interviewing Major John R. Sacker, U.S. Air Force (ret.), for the University of North Texas Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on Friday, February 24, 1989, in Temple, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Sacker in order to preserve for the record his recollections while serving with the 9th Signal Service Company at Pearl Harbor during the Japanese attack on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Sacker, to begin this interview, would you tell me very briefly about your life before you entered the military service? I would especially like to know when and where you were born, where you grew up, and what sort of education you had.

Mr. Sacker: I was born in South Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I attended South Philadelphia High School, and because of the aftermath of the stock market crash, I joined the Army. I had to leave school to help my family. I had to get a job.

At that time the Civilian Conservation Corps came into being when President Roosevelt brought that out, and I enlisted for two years. We built many things, and I'm sure a lot of people are familiar with the Civilian Conservation Corps. We built park areas, parking lots and picnic areas out in national forests areas, lakes.

When I got out of that, I still wasn't too sure of what I wanted to do, so I enlisted in the Army in July of 1940. I tried to get in the Marines, but I had a decayed tooth. They said "Get that fixed, and then they'd take me in the Marines. So I went and enlisted in the Army. They told me that if I was a bugler, why, I could be in the band, and I think it was in California at that time.

Anyway, they offered me a chance to go to Hawaii, and I jumped at it. I thought that would be wonderful to go to Hawaii. I was in the 9th Signal Service Company. We took a military transfer to the ship, and they...what was the name of that? Anyway, we went around through the [Panama] canal, came up the coast to California and stopped at San Francisco, and went to...I must have missed a spot. When I first got into the Army, when I first enlisted, I went to Fort Slocum, New York, and had some training there prior to being shipped out.

Young: Mr. Sacker, I understand the circumstances financially with many people of your age in the 1930s and how that drew them into the military service, and you've explained

for us your decision to enter the United States Army. I would like you to remember for me, if you will, what your basic training was like. What I'm interested in is, did you feel like it was any longer or shorter than was normal? Did you feel like that men were being rushed into the service for any purpose?

Sacker: No, I feel that at that time that there wasn't any hurry. We were all aware of Hitler's activities in Europe, but at that time we didn't really think it was going to involve us. The training was movement of mass--a group. They formed us up in platoons of sixteen or eighteen soldiers, and we marched. We assumed the position of a soldier, which is at attention. At that time they didn't use rifles or guns, just movement--marching and keeping cadence and right flank, left flank, and all of those kinds of things. It was designed to give you the basic movements of a soldier. It gets very difficult to move a mass people in a herd like cattle. They move a lot better in a uniform group at a particular cadence; and you can control them better, and you can turn them in any direction easier than just everybody forming up and running over here (chuckle). We didn't get weapons training until later. We were there a couple of months, and it was probably at least six weeks before we got rifles. We just drilled with the rifles. Close-order drills, they called it--how to start from standing still

with a rifle, and as you step off you raise the rifle up to your shoulder and move out; and you come to a halt and bring your rifle down. It was all the basic soldier-type stuff.

Young: Once the basic skills were taught to you, where did you go from there? By that, I mean, what sort of advanced training did you have?

Sacker: Well, we had what they called extended Army drill. You spread out, and it's moving in a line; you advance on a position at orders, and you drop down and assume a prone position for firing. You've got bayonet drills. You've got crossing ravines. These are activities that not only keep you in physical condition, but they also are things that are basic to a soldier. The primary item is getting you to react immediately to whatever commands they gave you--to get down or get up or run or whatever. We were all young fellows, so it was kind of fun at first (chuckle). Then we were not thinking about a war footing or that you would be in a combat situation, because at that time we were not.

Young: At some point, after they had made you into a pretty good soldier, the decision is made for you to enter the Signal Corps. How did that come about, and what kind of training did it involve?

Sacker: Well, actually, when I first enlisted, I was scheduled to join a signal outfit, but I couldn't just go right out

from civilian life into a unit like that. You had to go through the basic training, and I had to complete so many weeks of the training before I was ready. And I was really not ready for the 9th Signal Service Company either (chuckle) because at no point did they really train you as a signalman. I got that when I joined the unit, which was after the boat trip to Hawaii. They had classes set up where we were given the Morse code and instructed in Morse code. Once you got the basic code, then they tried to...it's just like typing. They try to improve your speed of reception and transmission. I never got to twelve words a minute, so they turned me over to the maintenance and installation of radio gear and antennas and pole climbing, which you have to go through a school to learn that, too.

Young: I understand that the 9th Signal Service Company was already at Pearl Harbor when you joined it.

Sacker: Yes, it was.

Young: Do you remember anything especially about that trip to Pearl Harbor from the States?

Sacker: Well, many of the young fellows had never been on a ship before. Between the CCC and enlisting in the Army, I had spent a few months on an oil tanker, so I was familiar with a rolling deck (chuckle) and the ship plowing through the water and rolling and vibrating. I was able to get by without getting seasick. On that military transport, they

had the latrines on the deck. It was enclosed, but when you did your daily..

Young: You may use any word you wish. This interview is for you.

Sacker: Oh, well, you sat over a trough, and there's saltwater running below. In fact, when the ship was rocking, you would get splashed (chuckle). But they used to do little things like set some tissue paper on fire set it down under you (chuckle). Anyway, that's a little humor of going overseas. We did some calisthenics and had some training while we were on the ship. They didn't want you wasting your time. Of course, we had jobs, too. You'd get KP or you'd get guard duty on ship or assisting the librarian or assisting the medics or the cooks. They had little ways to keep you busy so you didn't enjoy just a sea cruise to Hawaii.

Young: When that cruise was over, when you found yourself in the islands for the first time, you know, you're a young man, a young soldier, and you're in a new place. When you got settled in and you first had some free time of your own, what did you do with it?

Sacker: Well, in the company, in the 9th Signal Service Company, it was easy to get acquainted. We were young and open. We went swimming a lot in the ocean. We went to the various beaches that were scattered around on the opposite side of the island. Guadaloupe was the name of one place, and it was on the windward side of the island, and the

waves really...I imagine the surfboarders now would like that place because I think that's where I lost my hair. The waves just throw you down on the beach because they were rolling. You would come in over the top of the wave and land on your head. The sand had lots of thorns in it. Algarroba trees grew along the beach, and they have thorns as long as your finger. When you step on one, while you're jumping around trying to get that out, you get one in the other foot (chuckle). But anyway, we all got pretty well suntanned.

We had a swimming pool close to the company, and if we couldn't get down to the beach, we could swim in the pool. We weren't as rowdy, I guess, as some. We went to the library; we went to the gymnasium. The group that I was with played basketball. We won the basketball championship at Fort Shafter. There were a lot of units on the base.

Young: Well, throughout the Army at that time, I know sports were a very, very big thing.

Sacker: Very big, especially in Hawaii. Officers would recruit athletes, and you could hear them saying, "Check that guy out. Different people were coming out, and if you looked like a big, strong fellow, they wanted you to be a wrestler or a boxer or play football at Schofield Barracks. They had everything...baseball. Especially later on, when some big league ball players came in, their

main activity was playing baseball. They didn't even get to soldier. At the time I was there, the man that broke the color line in baseball from Brooklyn, Jackie Robinson, was playing football there. They were professionals, and they were rough. Anyway, that was going on at that time.

Young: You liked basketball, did you?

Sacker: Well, I don't like it anymore because they don't even play the same game. But I liked basketball. I enjoyed it with the group I played with.

Young: Did you play back court or..

Sacker: I was a guard.

Young: You mentioned Fort Shafter. Was a lot of the competition there at Fort Shafter?

Sacker: Well, at each place, I guess. There were so many units. You can get ten, twelve different basketball teams or baseball teams or whatever from the various units on the base. The ones we enjoyed beating most were the MP's (chuckle)

Young: Where exactly was your unit stationed?

Sacker: At Fort Shafter.

Young: At Fort Shafter?

Sacker: Yes. Now Fort Shafter was located on a rise so that you could look down and see Pearl Harbor, Hickam Field, all that in that area. The hospital, Tripler General Hospital, was right outside the gate. I just saw something the other day that Tripler General is huge now.

It was just a little building at that time.

Young: Did you ever get into the town among the civilian population itself?

Sacker: Oh, yes. We didn't just go to the base side. We went downtown. We had a lot of activity. There was an auditorium where we went swimming. It was a strange installation in that it sits out in the surf. Actually, the deepest water is about twenty feet, twenty-five feet, where the high dive diving boards are and all that. This was built right out into the ocean. I don't know if it's there today, but it was great. We used to love to go there. We spent a lot of time on the beach.

Young: Well, there are literally thousands of stories about Hotel and Canal Streets downtown.

Sacker: Oh, yes.

Young: As best as you can remember, among the men that you ran around with, what were the more popular spots for them downtown?

Sacker: We used to go to the YMCA, and we used to get in fights with the Navy down there. But that's where we did a lot of our sports activities. We played handball and racquetball, stuff like that.

Young: You talked about fighting with the Navy. Who was more to beware of, the Military Police or the Shore Patrol downtown?

Sacker: I never had any trouble with the Shore Patrol. The

Military Police traveled in a group. You would see four in a group all the time. They never traveled with less. We traveled by bus. There was bus transportation provided on the island. You could take a bus from the base to downtown anytime of day or night at a slight charge. You could buy tokens or "slugs, as we used to call them.

We went to bars. Not a lot, because the guys that I traveled with were not real interested in all that.

Young: Sounds like you had a jolly bunch of people.

Sacker: We had a really good bunch.

Young: Did you get along?

Sacker: Yes.

Young: When you were talking about the reasons you came into the service, you already told me that you were aware of trouble in Germany and the way things were. When you were in the islands, especially when you were out among the civilians, surely you encountered a lot of Japanese people.

Sacker: Oh, sure.

Young: When you did, given the circumstances or what you knew, what kind of impression did those people make on you?

Sacker: I thought they were nice people. I thought so then, and I thought so later. The attack and all, while it was a surprise, was kind of expected because the Japanese were a warrior class of people. I didn't think anything spectacular about that. I just thought they were foolish

to attack us because I didn't think they had a chance of winning.

Anyway, I dated a Chinese girl. Lillian Chin, her name was. She was very nice. She was a librarian. We dated a few times. They're very serious. They were then--the Japanese, the Chinese people. There were a lot of Filipino people there, too. All of those people, they liked to have fun, but in the main they were serious. I don't know. I think Europeans are probably that way, too. They didn't fool around or joke around as much as we did.

Young: Altogether, about how long were you in the islands with the 9th Signal Service Company before the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Sacker: Well, I got there in the fall around...we got there just before Thanksgiving of 1940, and the attack came on December 7, 1941, so it was just a little over a year.

Young: During that time, were you ever, as part of a briefing or a part of training, warned to be on the lookout for any kind of sabotage or any sort of subversive activity?

Sacker: No. We were placed on alert. I imagine it was...I can't recall exactly, but I think it was at least six weeks before the attack. It was when the meetings in Washington were going on. I have forgotten the names of the two Japanese envoys in Washington. I have forgotten their names now.

Young: Was the knowledge of that meeting pretty widespread among

your friends?

Sacker: Among my friends, not really, because the military is made up of various educational levels, and there are some people who spend a lot of time running up and down the street at those hotels or something (chuckle). I don't know. Well, among my friends, the thing that they did every Saturday morning was an inspection of your quarters and of your uniform, you know, haircuts and all. When the company commander would go down the ranks, he would stop at various soldiers and talk to them about something. Not each one. But he'd see something he didn't like or something, or he commended the man for something. He'd look at your weapon. But the question always was, "What do you think of our foreign policy?" It got to be a joke, and the standard answer was, "What foreign policy?" (laughter)

Young: This is the end of Side A, Tape One. But at any rate, you talked about it. You knew what was going on, and you thought about it a great deal. I find that very interesting. In addition to all of the impressions you got from reading the papers and what you saw in town, I know you had a job to do. I'd like you now to, if you would, remember for me your work routine, your training. Maybe tell me something about the equipment that you had to maintain.

Sacker: We had a receiver/transmitter combination, and we worked

on those. We had a shop...after I got some training in maintenance, they decided they couldn't use me as a telegrapher. They assigned me to a line officer, a lieutenant. He was more like a father to us. I don't know how long he had been in the service--forever, it seemed like--but he knew how to handle people, knew how to talk to you, you know, didn't put you down. He wasn't an "I'm the boss" type. He was really helpful and worked with us very patiently to learn how to repair the equipment and how to keep it maintained. We also had a young fellow in there who was familiar at that time with television. I had never heard of television before. He said that he encountered it at the World's Fair, and from then and there he got real interested. And he was just like us; he was just a private like me.

Young: Were you getting new equipment all through this time?

Sacker: At that time I guess we had the standard Signal Corps equipment. Well, we had a thing called a diversity, which a lot of the stations will make up, especially from the War Department, from Washington. They'll make up an hour-long message for our area on a tape, and then they feed this tape in a machine, and it comes out five hundred words a minute. So five hundred words a minute just sounded like a squeal, and it comes on a tape. So then after that, you sit there, and you type the message. As the tape goes through, you read it. What it is is holes

in the tape for dots and dashes (chuckle). So to do that fast, you got to be very quick. I didn't do that too good.

Young: It took a great deal of agility and a lot of quickness to do this.

Sacker: Oh, it really did.

Young: Do you think that..

Sacker: Eye-to-hand coordination.

Young: Do you think the Army was interested in that newfangled television that your friend knew about at that time?

Sacker: Not at that time, no. I don't think they were aware of it's possibilities. I think it was too new. I still don't think it's used the way it could be--myself. I think it's probably the greatest training device ever to come down the road, and yet it's not used for that.

Young: Did you ever encounter any radio gear that was used for listening or monitoring overseas communications? Did you ever have to maintain that sort of gear?

Sacker: No. We had with us...oh, I don't know (chuckle)...probably men like Oliver North. That's probably classified information because we had with us the 2nd Signal Corps personnel, and one of their functions was to do what you're asking. In fact, they were involved in breaking the Japanese code.

Young: This particular unit that was assigned to work with the 9th?

Sacker: Yes. They worked in combination with the Navy. Of course, it was a strange group because some of them, when they dressed in uniforms, were in Navy uniforms and...

Young: The 2nd Signal Service Company?

Sacker: No, just 2nd Signal Corps.

Young: Just a 2nd Signal Corps.

Sacker: They didn't tell us very much, and they kept to themselves. They seemed like above average in intelligence. I mean, to me they did. I don't know what other people thought, but from talking to them, when I got a chance to talk to them, they seemed above average. They weren't just high school graduates. We had some people that were lucky to be out of the third grade.

Before Pearl Harbor Sunday, we used to play volleyball in our area. We played tennis. We had a tennis court. One of the corporals and I played as a team. We played team tennis, and we played team handball.

Young: We've talked about your work and some of the things you did when you had spare time. I would like to focus a little bit on the time as we get closer to Pearl Harbor Sunday itself. I'm interested in whether or not you noticed any change in the passes you got, the spare time, any change in your work routine in the week or two weeks before Pearl Harbor Sunday.

Sacker: Well, we did go to several other islands in the Hawaiian group. We were responsible for keeping all of the radio

equipment in the whole chain of islands in good repair and operation. We were also responsible for antenna repairs. You can see, as you drive around here or anywhere today, where these towers have lights on top--various lights, blinking lights. Well, we had to keep them in repair. Just prior to, oh, I would say, maybe two months before Pearl Harbor, we had to repaint all of them, which was a real chore, and make sure that all the lights were operational. We had to hang a few antennas. They had what they called a rhombic antennae. It's in three triangular...I can't explain it very professionally, but it's very capable of sending messages a long distance. We also had to erect cage antennas. We had to put those up. This was still several months before the attack, in the outer islands mostly. We also went out to Sand Island. Sand Island put out a radio beacon, homing beacon, for aircraft. It was especially for the weather.

Young: Talking about the maintaining the equipment that helps the aircraft to land on instruments essentially, I know you finished your career in the Air Force, and quite likely you've always been pretty much aware of aircraft traffic. In the short period of time before Pearl Harbor, I suppose there was a great deal of Army Air Corps activity. What I'd like to know is, were you accustomed to seeing Air Corps aircraft practicing dive-bombing on ships in the harbor, or were you accustomed to hearing the sound of

those engines and maybe the gunfire from target practice?

Sacker: Yes, the Marines periodically and also the Air Corps. Like I said earlier, we could see Hickam Field. They had B-18s and B-10s.

Young: Would you stop and explain for me a little bit what a B-18 and a B-10 is?

Sacker: Well, they are early bombers. The B-18 looked quite a bit like a C-47 (Chuckle) That's not going to help you much, but in civilian airlines it was a DC-3.

Young: I understand a DC-3, a two-engine Air Force craft.

Sacker: Yes. They used those, well, for twenty years, anyway. They didn't have as much trouble with them as they have with jets today. On the DC-3 the angle of the wings--the way the wings were set on that--was forward. But on the bomber, the trailing edge was straight and was on the tail. They just flopped the wing over for the bomber, B-18, and the leading edge was straight and the trailing edge was angled. Aerodynamically I can see where they would be advantageous. The C-47s were very stable. What the difference would be for the bomber, I have no idea. I can't even imagine. But it was a twin-engine plane and fairly small as bombers go. They have got to be monstrous, you know.

The B-10 was even smaller. It had a weird-looking bombardier section. It was dome-shaped, but there were separations. At that time, I don't think they knew how to

curve the plexiglas around just as a clear dome, so it was in sections. It looked like a bird cage with glass (chuckle)--a very strange-looking thing--and that was on the nose. Later on, well, I guess before the Japanese came, they had A-20s, and just about the day before Pearl Harbor, the B-17As came in there. No, it wasn't the day before--it couldn't have been--because they would have been destroyed. They came the day after. They were on their way when the attack occurred.

Young: The B-17A...now that, of course, was an early type of the Flying Fortress, which did such yeoman service.

Sacker: Yes.

Young: That aircraft wasn't very heavily armed, was it?

Sacker: No, not the early one.

Young: You were saying that the B-17s could not have come the day before because they would have been destroyed.

Sacker: They would have been destroyed.

Young: As you looked down at Hickam Field, as those aircraft were parked, I understand they were pretty well lined up in neat little rows.

Sacker: The Air Force still does it today. They just line them all up. As a fighter pilot, I loved that (chuckle).

Young: There's been a lot said and a lot written about how easy those targets were--those neat little rows. I understand that there's some justification in being able to keep an eye on them all by lining them up. Is that true? Do you

know a reason?

Sacker: Well, it had its advantages for some things, but it certainly had disadvantages. When I flew bombers in Italy, we had revetments. Each bomber was separated and was bunkered so that if one bomb destroyed my airplane it wouldn't destroy all the other ones. I think they didn't do that in Hawaii because they never expected them to come.

Young: Perhaps that was the lesson we learned.

Sacker: Well, no, (chuckle) they still do it now. All these years later, they've gone back to lining them up--parking them. They look pretty, like a parade.

Young: As we move on down near the end of this section of tape, I would like to really have you to call up your memory and try to remember the weekend of Pearl Harbor. First of all, the Saturday. I'd like to know as much as you can remember about your routine, whether you were at work or on pass on that Saturday, December 6, 1941.

Sacker: Well, I mentioned earlier that we were put on alert. I think it was about six weeks before. Now we would be on alert for five days and then off. During these periods of alert, we would have a backpack ready with extra clothes, socks, underclothing, an extra uniform, shaving gear--just like you were going to go on a trip somewhere. You had your backpack and a bandoleer of ammunition. I had a pistol assigned to me. I had a pistol card. They called

us out several times for a practice gas attack. We had gas masks. It was a lot like a steel triangle, you know, that would be like calling you to dinner. That was the gas attack signal. You ran out and put your gas mask on and lined up just like you were going to go to breakfast or whatever. You were in your platoon, and you were lined up in your normal position in rank; and they came down and checked the straps and the fit and all that, which is very important because a lot of people get tired of having that on so tight. It's just like an oxygen mask when you're flying. Anyway, we did that kind of thing. We kept our weapons clean and kept them ready to go. We would go to work with the equipment in case we happened to go to war.

Young: As far as you can remember, that Saturday was a routine day?

Sacker: Pretty much routine. We had no...if anyone knew about it...well, we had been told that there was a possibility. Now this is the reason we were on alert, was that there was a possibility, but everybody kind of snickered at the thought. As I understand from reading the book, And I Was There, they were more alert or more aware of the possibility or probability than we were.

Young: You mean the Navy?

Sacker: Yes, because he was actually in the intelligence section in the Navy at Pearl Harbor. In fact, the guy who wrote it was in charge. On Saturday we had a pass, but because

of the alert status, we had just so many hours. We couldn't go out and come back in the morning at 8:00 like we used to do. You know, we used to be able to come back in the morning.

Young: Your pass was.

Sacker: After inspection on Saturday, you didn't even need a written pass or anything. You could just go to town and come back on Monday morning at 8:00 in time for work call. You wouldn't have to eat there or anything, although they liked to know because how they feed is by the number of personnel who are expected to be there. So if they had five hundred men in a company, they would prepare five hundred meals for five hundred people. It was one of the reasons for the passes. I think that's a good method the military uses, because you don't waste food that way. If you're going to have eighty people, then just serve food for eighty people. You don't have food for nine hundred (chuckle) and only have eighty people show up. They usually got a little upset if you took more food than you were going to eat and just started throwing it out, which I thought that was a good idea, too. A lot of people don't have anything to eat.

Young: This is the end of Side B, Tape One. Well, as far as the...

Sacker: Well, it was a normal day for us in the Army, anyway, and large numbers of people--I'm sure this has come out many

times--were in town living it up. There was no reason they shouldn't. We had no information. Nothing was different from the last weekend or the weekend before, ad infinitum. So a number of people went out to do what they always do--drinking and dancing and carousing, being obnoxious and fighting, and everything else. I don't know. I don't recall going out that night. There was something going on on the base. I think we were still on the base playing basketball. We hadn't finished our basketball game.

Young: Okay, you were still involved playing basketball.

Sacker: Basketball, right. We were supposed to get a jacket, and we were supposed to get all kinds of trophies and the whole works because of having beaten most everybody. We had about a game or two left. Two games left, I believe. We had beaten the Military Police. We beat them twice.

Young: So you were well on your way to a base title in basketball.

Sacker: Yes, and I was looking forward to that. Anyway, you could get beer on the base, so we had no reason to go to town. I think we spent the evening here talking about the basketball games, and after that we went to bed, well, the carousers came in pretty late and woke everybody up and disturbed the peace.

Well, my friend, Milton, and I went to church in the morning. He was a real good Christian boy.

Young: Now we're talking about Sunday morning, the morning of the attack.

Sacker: Sunday morning. Oh, I know what I had forgotten to tell you. That Saturday afternoon we had played touch football, and I had stepped in a hole and sprained my ankle. So I had to limp over to the church for Mass. We were in the middle of Mass, before taking Communion. The church was almost empty. It had fifteen people in it. There was a woman sitting in the pew ahead of us. Then there was this tremendous explosion. I told you we were not far from Hickam Field and Pearl Harbor. You could see them from our base.

Young: You were attending Mass in a church...

Sacker: .on the base.

Young: ..on the base.

Sacker: It was on a hill, set on a hill, so you could look out and see everything.

Young: Would you for a moment just go into a little more detail about that view? What could you see from where you were?

Sacker: Well, we could see Ford Island, which is in Pearl Harbor. We couldn't identify ships; but later on, when we came out and the smoke was coming up, we could see that the smoke was coming from the ships that were lined up in the harbor.

Young: You hadn't even gotten to take Communion in the service.

Sacker: No, I didn't.

Young: And your first awareness of trouble was an explosion?

Sacker: Oh, yes. "BOOM!" And this woman almost cleared the top of the back of the pew. I guess we bounced up, and she looked like she was just sitting in the air. Of course, the father stopped and looked around. At that time at Mass, they faced the alter. Now they turn around. I don't know if you're familiar with this.

Young: Yes, sir. They once did face the alter, but now they face the congregation.

Sacker: He'd go from one end of the alter to the other. Then there were more--you know, just a succession of loud BOOMS. Well, after about the fourth or fifth one, the father realizes something is wrong because we can now hear aircraft cruising over, and also the antiaircraft guns started opening up. This was just within minutes. I would never have dreamed that the AA could set up that quickly with no prior notice.

Young: Is this antiaircraft fire you're talking about from Fort Shafter?

Sacker: We had an antiaircraft battery on the base. I don't know why, but we did. We had a number of units there on base. The military Police were there. I think we even had a field artillery unit, which was...well, I don't know that it was strange. It was a pretty big base. We had trucks.

Young: It seems that you are saying that by the time you were really aware of what was going on and got out to look

around, the antiaircraft fire was going.

Sacker: Yes.

Young: That is very quick.

Sacker: Why I say that was because when we went to Mass, there was a unit sitting beside the highway. Whether their alert called for them to be out like that or not, I don't know, but no one was there; I mean, there were no men to man it. A piece like that has to spread out and set up to fire. When they are going to move it, they'd fold it up and then leave. Well, that's the way it was when we went by going to Mass. Then within minutes...it was fantastic to me that they could set up that quickly. They had to get ammunition from somewhere. Maybe they had it already. See, I'm not familiar with their alert status. But we'd been on alert on and off, I should say, because we would be off a day, on for five, and off for a day. It just seemed like they couldn't make up their mind, or maybe the information that they got at headquarters was not disseminated to the rest of us folks.

Young: I'm very interested in you personally. When you heard those explosions and you saw that lady clear the top of the pew, what did you do?

Sacker: Well, there was some information as to the Marines doing gunnery practice that day, and I thought it was awful close to home (chuckle), that they should be out there a ways. I thought that possibly an airplane crashed. Very

vague. I didn't think, "Oh, an airplane crashed!" But I thought something must have happened, and one of them crashed.

But after several explosions, four or five, they were still coming down, and the priest said, "The Mass is over! Go back to your unit!" We got outside, and you could see the smoke going up from Pearl Harbor. Not only that, but you could see them diving and strafing Hickam Field. We encountered an officer who was probably with the Hawaiian National Guard. He was not Caucasian. This just registered, you know. At that time you didn't think black or white or yellow or pink or anything. I remember that he was not a Caucasian. He shouted, "Get back to your units! Get back to your units!" That's what he said: "Run!" Well, I was limping and everybody just left me, and I'm hobbling along with one-and-a-half feet.

We no sooner get into the area, and everybody was lining up with their backpacks and all. A lot of them already had rifles, and they were moving out. We went with our team. See, I was on this maintenance team, and I was looking for them. Sergeant Sartino was my NCO, and I didn't see the lieutenant. I don't know where he was. But Sergeant Sartino said, "Get your weapon! We'll be on the truck in the front!" We had a fellow driving the truck. We had a G.I. pickup. Corporal Ditmeyer was the driver. I think he needed a few lessons (chuckle). He

pretty near killed us (laughter). We went careening out through the gate, and we went out to Hickam Field.

Young: Did you know where you were going? Did you have an assigned place to be?

Sacker: Well, they didn't say...no. I had no idea where we were going. Evidently Sartino did because we careened down the road, down to Hickam Field, and through the gate. (Chuckle) I mean, we took a few corners on two wheels, and it was here that I said, "Good God! I would just as soon get hit with a bomb!" Well, they were starting to strafe while I was in line to get my .45 and five rounds. Five rounds of .45-caliber ammunition!

Young: There was not even a gun prepared?

Sacker: Didn't even have a clip, nothing. I had a clip, but the clip was empty. Anyway, the supply sergeant said, "You guys are going to have to form a line!" I can remember looking up and seeing this Jap plane with the red balls on the underside. I recognized it now. He wasn't fifty feet in the air, and he was firing. He was firing at the antiaircraft people on the road. I know that because that's the direction he was taking his plane.

Young: Is this the first point that you were sure that these were Japanese aircraft?

Sacker: Oh, yes. Well, it was all kind of conversation going on, people shouting back and forth and all that. But for me, with my own eyes, I saw this Japanese plane.

Young: As you got to Hickam Field, what met your eyes? What was there?

Sacker: We no sooner got to Hickam Field and we got diverted. Oh, we got there long enough to see that they were blowing hangar doors off, and airplanes were trying to taxi out, and they were getting strafed and on fire. To move bigger aircraft, even fighters sometimes, they have a tug--what they called a tug--that they hook on the airplane. They have a tow bar, and they hook on the airplane, and they move the airplane around and park it in those rows.

Young: In those neat little rows.

Sacker: (Chuckle) Neat lines, all lined up. This tug had a machine gun mounted on it. I don't know why it was there, because they lost a number of people. They ran that thing out there and manned the machine gun. As one fighter passed they'd fire at it. I've forgotten what caliber it was. I think it was in the .30-caliber machine gun.

Young: Was it a water-cooled machine gun? Could you tell?

Sacker: Oh, yes, it was water-cooled. They had a .50-caliber machine gun on the front of the tug. But I was thinking about the Japanese aircraft. I think they fired .30-caliber machine guns, but I'm not sure anymore. I did know all that once. One plane would pass, and a guy would run out there and man the gun, and he'd be gone; and then another would pass, and another guy would run out, and he'd be gone.

Young: There was no armor behind or in front of the machine gun?

Sacker: No, it was sitting out in the open--nothing around it.

Young: And yet someone continued to man that gun?

Sacker: Man, I saw more heroes that day than I've ever heard of before in my life. Obviously, they are going to get killed.

Young: As you looked at the men around you and what they were doing while you were there at Hickam, did you find mostly men doing their jobs?

Sacker: Right. Well, there was an awful lot of confusion. To go from deep peace into war, it's confusing. It boggles the mind.

Young: Did you have time to be scared?

Sacker: Oh, no. You had something to do. I think if you sat there and thought about it, you might just...because if you there...there's enough people being blown away, with arms and legs and blood and guts all over you. He said, "Get up there! Climb that pole! Hang that antenna!" I said, "Yes, sir, and I climbed that pole. I was looking down at the airplanes strafing and dropping bombs, and, man, it looked like a hornet's nest, you know, with them flying around in all directions. Even some of our own fighters, a couple of P-40s, got into the air.

Young: You were told to climb a pole, and what you thought of doing was climbing a pole. Is that right?

Sacker: Yes. That's one of the things I was trying to get across

at first. The whole point of training is to get you disciplined to react to orders, not "Oh, I don't think I'll do that. I'll do that after while. It doesn't work that way because "now" can mean the difference between your living and dying.

Young: You have mentioned several times the discipline and the training, and obviously you were proud of it and happy with it. Do you think that the quality and the professionalism of these people...was that due in any large measure to the fact that this was a volunteer army, a volunteer service mostly, at that time?

Sacker: Oh, I think it was all-volunteer when I went in. I'm sure it was volunteer. Everybody I knew was volunteers.

Young: Well, I've heard mention that some draftees were there.

Sacker: Oh, yes, but, see, I was in a year before the war.

Young: Yes, sir.

Sacker: So the people that I knew and worked with were volunteers. Now later on, when I became a pilot, I ran into all kinds of inductees. I think, personally, it's like anything. If you are to do something, you're more apt to do it well if you want to do it rather than when somebody grabs you by the collar and says, "Do this, and tries to force you into doing something. Most of the guys wanted to be in the service. I enjoyed it. There are a lot of things that I didn't like, but that all happened later. At that time, it was all laughs.

Young: But you were busy at Hickam Field during the whole attack.

Sacker: Oh, yes. We went from Hickam to Red Hill, which was what you asked me when you first came here.

Young: Yes, sir.

Sacker: That's where we finished up that day, because General Short moved his headquarters there.

Young: At Red Hill, as I remember, I think they...

Sacker: At that time it was an ammunition storage area, and it had tunnels. It was tunneled under, and I think that they believed that in the event of a continuous attack or wartime that that would be an ideal place for headquarters, so that's where they sent us.

Young: I see.

Sacker: Part of our job was hanging the antenna. See, we were out of the net. The first attack knocked out our transmitting antennas, so we were shut off from Washington and San Francisco. Anyway, we were out of the net, and one of the things you've got to do real quick is get back in the net because of orders or information.

Young: Were you able to get your equipment back to function?

Sacker: Oh, we set up right there. Milton, my friend, he was on top. I don't know where they got them--they must have been there--but we used metal racks that we stuck our transmitting equipment and receiving equipment. We were bringing in the power lines.

I forgot who was doing it, but, anyway, he had a pair

of diagonals, pretty heavy diagonals, and he reached in there. When he snapped them, he touched the side of the box and flew across the room. I thought he was killed, really. He had a blue flash, but the power wasn't on, so we got that taken care of (chuckle). The general was standing there watching it and shaking his head. Anyway, that could be real interesting, setting up the equipment, but we finished there.

And we hadn't eaten all day. In fact, we didn't even think about eating. You're busy and food is the farthest thing from your mind unless you don't have anything to do but just sit there and think about being hungry. We were either running up the hill or down the hill or helping something out. Anyway, the day ended finally.

Oh, the final thing was, we kept getting little bits of information. The Signal Corps also maintained the telephones, teletape, all that stuff, as well as radio. Some guys from our company--we knew the guys, but they weren't in our crew--were out trying to get the telephones hooked up for the new command post, and somebody shot at them. Some (chuckle) infantry guys thought they were saboteurs and shot at them.

Young: I've heard many stories of that. It was a time of being trigger-happy, I suppose.

Sacker: Oh, right, right. Okay, the next thing that happened was that one of our truck drivers...now he wasn't driving for

us, but it was a guy that was fairly new in our company. He was driving one of the trucks, and he came up to the gate. They were always sticking their gun in your face, their rifle, and they told him to halt. He was nervous, and his foot slipped off the break; and the truck jumped, and they shot him and killed him.

Later that night, up on the _____ Rise, which is back of the city, the 45th Infantry, I think it was, from Schofield Barracks was up there entrenched. They set up their area of fire with a machine gun, and they fired a few rounds and set the grass on fire. Well, the city fire department sent trucks up there to put the fire out, and the infantry started shooting at the fire trucks. So it was hairy (chuckle).

Young: This is the end of Side A, Tape Two.

Sacker: It still doesn't sound like I remember anything (chuckle). I guess I can say I lived it, but it doesn't seem like I remember it.

Young: You lived it and it seems like you aren't remembering much, but you're remembering a great deal that we don't know.

Sacker: Is it interesting?

Young: It's immensely interesting to me. As a matter of fact, we're going along a little further that we have to go, I think. And I think that's important. I do have one last question about that day. You've talked about the

uncertainty and the itchy security guard fingers. Was there really a fear that invasion would follow?

Sacker: There was. I guess it was among certain people. I believe the infantry people were either told that that was a possibility or were led to believe that that was a possibility. Consequently, every unusual sound or noise or anything seemed to trigger a reaction from those men. I don't blame them, either, because it was getting a little hairy toward the end of the day, especially when the rumors were flying. Somebody even said that they were on the island, you know, that the Japanese had landed. Well, we know that some of their airplanes got shot down because a Japanese pilot crawled out of the canal, and he wasn't even armed. This fellow, a Marine, just slashed him up with a bayonet and just cut him to ribbons, hacked his teeth--his gold teeth--and he was showing everybody his teeth.

Young: Was this later on Sunday? Later in the day?

Sacker: This is late that day, Sunday.

Young: Basically, the attack itself was over.

Sacker: Oh, the attack was over. It only lasted...there were actually two separate attacks, but an airplane can't...they had to fly so far and operate around there and then get back. They weren't there all that great a length of time. It seems like forever, but I think we were there somewhere around 8:00. I think the Mass we

went to was at 7:00, but I can't remember. The times are all screwed up.

Young: Basically, the Marine that you spoke of, who pulled this Japanese pilot from the water and..

Sacker: He didn't pull him in. He just let him crawl out.

Young; Let him crawl on his own.

Sacker: Dotted the I's and crossed the T's. A very blank face, you know. He was not the least excited about it or wasn't disturbed.

Young: Was this an event that you saw?

Sacker: No, I did not see that. I was told that. See, that's another rumor, but the people that were telling me said that he had the gold teeth and everything else. He could have knocked out a simple Japanese farmer down there for all I know (chuckle). But the reason I'm chuckling about all these things is because it kind of sounds strange after all these years.

Young: But their value endures, you see. The day is still as important. It's more important in a lot of ways to those of us who weren't there because we can't understand it. I'm guessing from what you said that you finished that Sunday in very much the same way you started. In other words, you went to Mass again that night.

Sacker: No, I didn't.

Young: You did not go?

Sacker: It was a week later when I went to Mass again.

Young: Could you tell me about that Sunday evening, Monday, Tuesday, and that week that followed, when you had time...

Sacker: I didn't have much time.

Young: Did you have any time to think about the attack?

Sacker: We were lucky to eat. Out of the whole week, I think we had about maybe nine meals, eight meals altogether when we had time to eat. We were going somewhere, coming back from somewhere, or stopping to do what you have to do. We were told to hurry up, that we were moving out again. Because of the nature of our work, we were still responsible for all the other islands, too, and keeping everybody in the net and everybody operational.

You hear a lot of weird things. We were lucky to sleep. I remember they wanted to keep going through the night. They even had floodlights (chuckle), trying to get us to work all night, too. We were getting a little tired, a little touchy. That's why a lot of this stuff was confused. Well, it was confusing to begin with.

We heard that a Japanese pilot came down on the outer islands and walked up to this Kanaka and told him he was Japanese, and this Kanaka just threw him against the wall about four or five times and smashed his head.

Young: That time so long ago, that we talked about, the memories are very useful. They are very important to us. Before I put that machine away, I would like you to just try briefly to explain the rest of the military career that

you had. I know that you went into the Air Force and that you flew. I see what I think is an F-86, which gained fame in Korea.

Sacker: In Korea, yes.

Young: Tell me a little bit about yourself after the war.

Sacker: Well, after everything settle down there, this friend of mine and I got together. I told you I left high school, so if you want to fly, you have to have some kind of education. So we went under the barrack. The barrack there is off the ground maybe five feet on stone pedestals-like, and it's just a clear area. They'd used a little of it for storage, but not much of it. Anyway, we went under there. We got books in mathematics and geography and history and everything else. We got a copy of the exam--not the answers, but what the questions would cover. We found out that we could apply. The exam was conducted by the University of Hawaii. We studied for several weeks. By January some more people were coming in and moving through and going to the South Pacific and all that. In fact, they changed our unit to the...oh, instead of it just being a company, they were going to make it a signal battalion, and about nine hundred people came in to be in our battalion.

Anyway, we studied, went and took the examination, and the room was full of people. There were a number of college kids who were taking the exam. My friend flunked

out, but I passed. So I had to leave my unit and go to a separate organization that was going to be aviation cadets, and that was at Hickam Field. So I left Fort Shafter, left all my buddies, and it just wasn't a week later that they all got shipped out to the South Pacific (chuckle), down to the New Hebrides. I had to meet a new group of people, of course. I think they were debating on whether to keep us there and train us there in Hawaii or ship us back to the States.

Evidently, the ground school and all that was not adequate for the number of people they expected, so they shipped us back. We went in a convoy from Hawaii back to San Francisco. We went to pre-flight training at Santa Ana, and then I came here to Texas, Pampa, Texas. (Chuckle) My instructor said, "You're too wild to be a fighter pilot, so we're going to put you in bombers. So he sent me to twin-engine school at Yuma, Arizona, and from there I went to Barksdale, Louisiana. I was in B-26s--Martin Marauders. (Chuckle) Pearl Harbor was a picnic compared to flying that thing. Oh, that was a monster.

Young: The B-26, if I remember correctly, is a twin-engine airplane.

Sacker: Martin twin-engine medium bomber, cigar shaped (chuckle).

Young: Could you describe the basic difference between the Mitchell and the Martin?

Sacker: Oh, well, speed-wise, they're pretty close. I don't know. .300 m.p.h. was the average air speed. One had Pratt and Whitney engines--the Marauder had Pratt and Whitney engines--and the B-25 had Wright Cyclone engines. They were pretty near the same horsepower. Another basic difference is that a Marauder had two bomb bays, but we never could use the rear bomb bay because if you loaded bombs in both bomb bays, the thing would settle down on its tail. So we actually had a prop gizmo to prop the tail up until you started the engines. But they got to where they didn't even use them. They just sealed that rear bay.

We flew back from West Palm Beach. We got sent down there from Barksdale when we finished the training there. When we got sent to West Palm Beach, we picked up a B-26, and we were supposed to deliver it to a B-26 outfit we joined in Italy. But we flew down to South America and across the Ascension Islands, west coast of Africa, and flew up to Casablanca. We went from there to a place called _____, and they said, "That's your last ride in a B-26. You're going to have to fly B-25s from now on. The guys say, "Oh, I want to stay with the B-26.

Anyway, we flew a couple of flights with the B-24, and we took that airplane...it was a replacement, anyway, so we took that up to Italy to...oh, near Mount Vesuvius, a small airport there, and I started flying missions. I

flew seventy combat missions. We made three single-engine returns. We got one engine knocked out right over Toulon, France, one time and almost lost it in the mountains coming back. I got on the wrong side of the mountains, and I kept losing altitude all the way back until I found a hole and got through a gulch and got back over. A Navy ship was in the dock there, a little town on Corsica, and they fired on us. We went right over them. The airfield was (chuckle) straight dead ahead, and we were coming down on one engine. The U.S. Navy thought we were trying to bomb them (laughter).

Anyway, when I came back, I got out of the Air Force and got married. You're not actually out of the service. The war was still on. We weren't out of the service, but we were in reserve status. Well, they had started a National Guard unit where my wife and I stayed, so I transferred. I finally got out of there, out of the service and active duty and the reserves, and got into the National Guard--the 175th Air National Guard, South Dakota. Joe Foss was the. .do you know Joe Foss?

Young; No, sir, I don't remember the name.

Sacker: (Chuckle) He was the Marine ace who shot down twenty-six airplanes in the South Pacific. Anyway, I changed then from...well, they had some B-26s, but these were North American rather than...they were Invaders rather than Martin Marauders. So it was a different airplane, but it

was just as bad (chuckle). Well, I flew them for a while, and then I got into P-51s.

At that time along came the Korean War. Joe Foss volunteered, and he volunteered our unit to fight in Korea (laughter). Anyway, we got activated and started intensive training.

Young: What were you flying at that time?

Sacker: P-51s. Well, from there we changed aircraft. We changed from P-51s to F-84s.

Young: How was that transition from the propeller to jet?

Sacker: Oh, I loved it. It was really wonderful. Well, the P-51 is a wonderful airplane, but the jet is so much easier. In a P-51 you can work up a sweat like you're digging ditches or something, because you have to work or you get killed (chuckle). But the jet is easy. You can just sit there with just two fingers on the_____and put your feet on the floor and do rolls or loops or whatever. It's a lot different.

Young: You did like the jets, didn't you?

Sacker: Oh, I did. But I loved that P-51, though. It separated the men from the boys.

Young: How modern did you go? How far in the jets? The F-86?

Sacker: F-86B. I flew the F-86, F-86Fs, too.

Young: This is the end of Side B, Tape Two. This is the end of the interview.