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Interview with
CARL B. MASON
July 28, 1981

Place of Interview: Carrollton, Texas

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Carl B. Mason

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Carrollton, Texas

Date: July 28, 1981

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Carl Mason for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on July 28, 1981, in Carrollton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Mason in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was stationed at Schofield Barracks during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Mr. Mason was a member of the 3rd Engineer Battalion at Schofield Barracks.

Mr. Mason, 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. Mason: I was born on August 1, 1922, in Dallas, Texas. As far as my education, I have very little, maybe the ninth grade. I was born and raised during the Depression in Texas when times were awful bad (chuckle). But I'd say one of the main reasons I went in the Army was more or less to get something to eat. You know, it was back in the Depression, and I came from a large family.

Marcello: You know, this is a standard reason that a lot of the men of your generation give to having entered the service. Like you pointed out, that was the time of the Great Depression, and jobs were hard to come by. Why did you decide to select the Army as opposed to one of the other branches of the service?

Mason: Well, I liked to play football and baseball, and I couldn't go to school. I had to work to provide for our family and everything. I loved football and baseball, so I sort of was going to pattern my life after ol' "Dizzy" Dean. I told my mother I was going to join the Army and that she'd have to sign for me, and I was going to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio. So when I went to the Army--and they had told me this--she'd have to sign for me. Then I went back and told my mother, and she signed for me, and I went back down there. Well, when I got down there, they said, "How'd you like to go to Hawaii in the 3rd Engineers?" I said, "Hawaii! I thought you had to be in the Navy to go over there!" And they said, "No, you will go to Schofield Barracks." I said, "Yes, I'd love to go!" So when I went back home, after I'd signed up and enlisted, my mother said, "If I'd have known that, I wouldn't have signed for you." So that's the way I come about being in Hawaii when the war broke out.

Marcello: What did you think of the idea of going to the Hawaiian Islands?

Mason: Well, like I say, I was surprised. I liked it when I first

heard about it, but my goal was to go into the Army and study and come out and go to Texas A&M. Why I picked Texas A&M, I don't know, but I really didn't have enough education if I had wanted to went. I had to take other courses, you know, before I could have went.

Marcello: Incidentally, when was it that you entered the Army? Do you recall the date?

Mason: Yes, March 4, 1941. On March 18, 1941, I left on the USS Edelor. It took six days. I arrived there on the 24th of March, 1941.

Marcello: So you must have gone from either Dallas or Fort Sam Houston over to perhaps Angel Island or San Francisco?

Mason: I left...and there was a great, big guy named Pete Peterson that enlisted with me, and Jack Erwin and George Keith. We left and they gave us meal tickets and train tickets to San Francisco. We went to Los Angeles...by the way, they laughed at us. We had ol' cowboy boots, and we got in the train station, and the people was laughing at us--how we was so countryfied, you know. You could branch off, but we went into Los Angeles, then went up the coast to San Francisco, and we was at a place, at that time, right under the Golden Gate Bridge, named Fort McDowell. We left from Fort McDowell. They issued us a choke collar uniform like they had in World War I and wrap-leggings.

Marcello: Did you have to give up your cowboy boots and all that sort

of thing there?

Mason: I didn't have them on, but "Big Pete" had them on, and I don't know whether anybody else had them on. Yes, we gave our clothes up.

Marcello: Now were these fellows that you went with friends of yours?

Mason: We were great friends. Two of them's dead. One of them was in the Pearl Harbor Gram before the last one--Earl Peterson. If you'll notice it in there, you'll see Earl Peterson. He's dead. Then one of my other friends got killed. He was in the construction business in Austin, and he got killed in an accident. But George Keith, I don't know where he's at.

Marcello: You were all boyhood friends at that time?

Mason: No, we had all met in Dallas when we enlisted. We was all Texans and all met when we enlisted together.

Marcello: So consequently then, you had no basic training, as we think of basic training today, before you left the States?

Mason: No, I went to Hawaii and took my recruit drill, as they called it at the time. I took my recruit drill there.

Marcello: Describe what happens when you get to Honolulu. Where do you go after you landed in Honolulu?

Mason: You mean on the ship?

Marcello: Yes.

Mason: Well, they took us on a little ol' train. They loaded us, and we went up to Schofield.

Marcello: Is this the train that's referred to as "The Pineapple Special?"

Mason: It might be. It might be. I don't remember. But it was a little ol' train, I remember, and they took us into Schofield with the train.

Marcello: Did somebody greet you at the docks, or meet you there, I should say?

Mason: Well, I don't remember whether they put leis around us, or what, back in those days. I don't know whether they just herded us off of that thing and put us on that little ol' train or what (chuckle). But there was a whole boatload of us--some of them for the infantry, some for the 3rd Engineers, some for the artillery. By the way, they had back in those days the pack train, too. I don't know whether you've heard of it or not, but they had the whole pack train. It had horses and mules.

Marcello: And that was over at Schofield Barracks, too, wasn't it?

Mason: Yes.

Marcello: So when you enlisted at Fort Sam Houston...

Mason: I didn't enlist at Fort Sam Houston; I enlisted in Dallas. I was going to go to Fort Sam Houston, but they enlisted me in Dallas and gave us meal tickets and trainfare to San Francisco.

Marcello: I see. When you did enlist, however, you did know that you were going into the 3rd Engineers?

- Mason: Yes, they told me here in Dallas, They told me I would be going into the 3rd Engineers.
- Marcello: Let us assume now that you have boarded this small train, and you're now at Schofield Barracks. You get off the train at Schofield Barracks. Describe what Schofield Barracks looked like from a physical standpoint.
- Mason: I remember that it was sort of a breath-taking; it was a beautiful place. You could tell that you was in a real proud outfit by their campaign hats and the barracks and the drill fields and all this. You could tell that you was going to be a soldier.
- Marcello: How large a place was Schofield Barracks?
- Mason: It was quite a large barracks, quite a large place. Have you ever seen these quadrangles?
- Marcello: No, but I know what you're referring to.
- Mason: The quadrangles were in a line, and the 3rd Engineers... Wheeler Field runs crossways like this here (gesture), and then the barracks started up like this here (gesture), and I was in the first quadrangle away from Wheeler Field. The 3rd Engineers was in the first barracks, I guess, going north.
- Marcello: How many stories were the barracks?
- Mason: There was the ground level...two stories, I guess. There was the ground level and then two above that.
- Marcello: And do you recall how many of these large quadrangles there were?

- Mason: Well, there had to be three, four...I don't know whether the artillery all had a...there was three infantry regiments and one engineer regiment, so that makes four. Then there was artillery, so I would say there was five or six of them offhand--somewhere in that vicinity.
- Marcello: That's pretty good. According to record; I think there were five of them.
- Mason: Yes, there had to be that many because...let's see...there were the 35th, the 21st, and the 27th Infantry Regiments, and then there was the 3rd Engineer Regiment. I used to know the artillery regiments, but I've forgotten them.
- Marcello: Were you in the 3rd Engineer Regiment or Battalion?
- Mason: Well, at the time it was a regiment. At the time of the Hawaiian Department, it was a regiment. Then they busted it up, and they made...they brought in...I don't know whether they did after the war or before. I can't remember. I believe it was after the war. Then they made the 24th and the 25th Divisions. They busted up our regiment and then put one battalion of our regiment in the 25th Infantry Division and made them the 65th Engineers, and they put us in the 24th Infantry Division and kept us as the 3rd Engineer Battalion.
- Marcello: Now did this reorganization occur after the actual attack or before?
- Mason: It seems like to me it did because...I don't know whether they did or not. I can't remember, but I believe it was after

because we were all together--the 3rd Engineer Regiment. We was all there. We all trained and worked together, I remember, on that day. I remember that on December 7th we were all together. My friends and all of us were together, and we split after that.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you were assigned to this quadrangle that was closest to or adjacent to Wheeler Field. I assume that you did not, however, occupy the whole quadrangle, or were there enough people in the 3rd Engineers that you did occupy the whole thing?

Mason: You see, at that time the whole regiment was there, and then when they busted the regiment up, after the war broke out, we never went back to the barracks again. We were out in the field from that time on. We never went back to the barracks at all. I never was back in those barracks again after the war broke out.

Marcello: Where were your quarters located in that quadrangle? First floor or second floor?

Mason: My quarters were on, I believe, the third floor.

Marcello: Oh, there was a third floor?

Mason: I believe it was the second floor. What's got me is the supply was here (gesture), and the offices were here (gesture), and the mess hall was over here (gesture). Now I keep calling that a floor, but it was two floors. There was this here (gesture), and then they had the first floor and then the

second floor. Now I want to call the ground floor the first floor. So there are two floors.

Marcello: So on the first floor, you would have supply and the officers' quarters and the mess hall, and then the second floor would be where the sleeping quarters were for the enlisted men.

Mason: It would be ground floor, first floor, and then second floor. I guess it would be that way, I don't know how it would be. Most of the senior sergeants and stuff slept on that first floor after you went up some stairs.

Marcello: I assume that each one of these quadrangles had its own mess hall and so on.

Mason: Each company had a section of that barracks, and then over on the right side, they had a movie in there. They had what they called a sally port. They had a movie in there, and they had a barber shop in there and a PX in there. Then you had the Headquarters and Service Company of the 3rd Engineers. Then the other barracks were...and I believe... I take it back now. I believe that over on this right side there was an MP company over there. A military police company, I believe, was over there on the right, if I ain't mistaken.

Marcello: So evidently, Schofield Barracks was a huge place.

Mason: Yes.

Marcello: In fact, it seems to me that that was the largest Army post in the world at that time.

Mason: It might have been.

Marcello: Describe what your particular living quarters were like inside the barracks.

Mason: Well, back in those days we had a...we were a whole lot different from the younger people. We had sort of a "live-by" standard; I mean, you didn't say anything bad about anybody. If you did, you went to him and said it to him. You didn't talk about poeple. In other words, our quarters was kept extremely clean because we didn't have the stuff like they got today. We were good soldiers, and we all tried to be. We didn't have...what do you call...we had different words, but I'm not going to use them on that tape. But we didn't have politicking and stuff like that. In other words, we all tried to outdo the other one, but we tried to do it in another way. We didn't try to politick; we tried to out-soldier him.

There was no theft at all. You could lay your money on your bed, and nobody would mess with your money. Nobody would get in your locker. We didn't even keep locks on them.

Our food was good. They issued us so much money, and your mess sergeant bought the food for you and everything. Our food was good.

They trained us hard, and we were treated real rough. We trained hard. We had a lot of sports. Our regimental

sports was pretty tough.

Marcello: I've heard it said that sports did play a very, very important role in the life of that pre-Pearl Harbor Army.

Mason: Yes, it played a large part in there. That was back in the days when you had to earn your respect, in other words. Even if you was a sergeant and you played sports, usually everybody respected that guy. If he made his rank through playing sports, everybody respected him not because he was an athlete but because he was a good, tough man. He was a good sergeant, also.

Marcello: Did you participate in sports there in Schofield?

Mason: I played football and baseball.

Marcello: Evidently, there were some pretty good teams there.

Mason: Great teams! Great teams! Everybody played for the fun of it, and everybody played rough and hard. It was a lot of fun. By the way, I made \$21 a month, too, when I went in. That's what I made.

Marcello: We were talking about sports, and one of the things that comes to mind are the so-called boxing smokers. Do you remember those?

Mason: I remember those. They tried to get me in the boxing smokers because I'd go down to the gym, and I'd box with them when I wasn't playing football or baseball. I could whip most of the boxers. I could whip all of them in my weight division, but being from Texas and in love with football, I didn't

participate in that. I went into football.

Marcello: I gather that those smokers were very, very well-attended.

Mason: Yes, they were. And so were the football games. The stands were full for every football game. The only sports that they didn't attend much was baseball. They didn't attend baseball very much. But for football, they'd just fill up the stands. And it was the same way with the boxing smokers.

Marcello: How intense was the competition among the various units?

Mason: Real intense, real tough. The 3rd Engineers and the 21st Infantry were great rivals in football because the 21st Infantry had a real good team and the 3rd Engineers had a real good team. They had a real tough rivalry there, but all of them were tough rivalries.

Marcello: I gather that the men from each unit would come out to cheer on their team and so on.

Mason: Yes, they'd come out in force.

Marcello: Would there be a lot of gambling or betting on these games?

Mason: Yes, there'd be a lot of betting and gambling on it. They had game rooms up through the barracks up there. They just had sheds; they called them sheds. On payday they'd be up there shooting dice and everything. They gambled real heavy (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, you arrive at Schofield Barracks, and this is where you take your basic training because you hadn't had any before you left the States. Describe what your basic training

was like there at Schofield Barracks.

Mason: I can remember my squad sergeant. His name was R. L. Adams. He was--what I came to find out later on--an excellent drill field sergeant; but after the war broke out, he wasn't quite tough enough, I think, to make a real combat soldier in the field and stuff, so he left. I don't know whether he went back to officer's school or where he went, but he...I don't remember...he wasn't in my company very long. The fact of the business was that they drilled us pretty hard; I mean, we had quite a bit of drilling and everything. Then we went on some forced marches, and at the end of our training...I don't know whether we went up on Kolekole Pass, but we went on some long hikes. They drilled us real good. We was drilled in things...I talk to Marines and soldiers and stuff about it now, and they never heard of it before. And we had water-cooled machine guns, and we was drilled real thorough in gasses and everything. It was real rough.

Marcello: How long did basic training last?

Mason: It lasted six weeks, but...as well as I remember, I believe it was six weeks...six or seven weeks. I believe it was six. Then when we were returned to duty, it was right on doing the same thing, you might as well say. You just kept on training.

Marcello: Now after you got out of that initial basic training, what particular kind of job or function or specialized training did you receive in the 3rd Engineers?

Mason: We trained just like the infantry. We was combat engineers, and we trained just like the infantry. We was trained in gin pole rigging and knots and rigging for pontoon bridges and stuff, which, at that time, we didn't have any. We was drilled in the knots and all this kind of stuff, and we was also drilled in dynamite and nitrostarch, black powder, TNT, and that kind of thing. We was trained real hard in that.

Marcello: And this kind of training went on after you got out of that so-called boot camp?

Mason: It continued on.

Marcello: Did you have a particular specialty, or were you trained in all of these things?

Mason: I was trained in all of them. But, later on, I was what you called a pioneer. We had flame-throwers and pole charges and satchel charges. I was trained...it's on my discharge papers that I was a pioneer, which I was.

Marcello: Now did you have this training before Pearl Harbor?

Mason: I had some training in it before Pearl Harbor, but I'd say most of it...we got into it real heavy after Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Did you get into much construction-type training during that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Mason: We had some construction. We built some barracks, I'd say, up on the north end of Schofield. We built some barracks up there; we had some construction, building. We had bulldozers, and the fact of the business is that the 3rd Engineers built

that road up on Kolekole Pass. There's a monument up there on the top of it. There used to be, but I don't know whether it's still up there or not. It was built by the 3rd Engineers.

Marcello: How about heavy equipment? Did you and your buddies have any training in the use of heavy equipment?

Mason: No, we was trained mostly like the infantry on account of being the combat engineers in the division. After the war broke out, we built pillboxes all around the island. We built machine gun nests and went up on the mountains and built 37-millimeter gun emplacements. We did all kinds of stuff like that after the war broke out.

Marcello: As you look back, with the perspective of forty years, how would you describe the morale of you and your buddies in the 3rd Engineers before the attack on December 7th?

Mason: Oh, our morale was great. We had a lot of competition in being a soldier and in the sports we played. We all kept our uniforms,..the fact of the business is that I saw them carry them out before the war. You see, when we pulled guard we'd have an "O.D." shirt with military creases in it, khaki pants, starched, and we had what we called "garrison shoes" in those days. Then we had canvas leggings, and then we had campaign hats. We'd get those things cut down to just where they'd fit over the top of our heads. We took a lot of pride in our uniforms. The morale was great.

Marcello: I think you mentioned a lot of other things that would have contributed to the high morale. You mentioned that the food was pretty good, and evidently your quarters were quite comfortable.

Mason: The quarters were kept clean and comfortable. That's where I believe the morale came in--everybody tried. If you got a whole unit that's trying, why, then it's a whole lot better than it would be if somebody's trying to tear up what you do.

Marcello: And everybody was kept busy.

Mason: Everybody was kept busy, yes. Discipline was extremely hard. Even a Pfc, you respected his rank. And an officer or sergeant, you really respected his rank.

Marcello: You mentioned that discipline was hard. Was it fair?

Mason: It was fair. It was hard. Like the old saying, it was hard but it was fair. It was hard, but it was fair.

Marcello: I keep coming back to the food once again. I guess, since you had grown up during the Depression, that that military chow was quite good.

Mason: It was really good. Excellent.

Marcello: Were there any particular meals that the Army had that you didn't like?

Mason: Well, no. Being raised during the Depression, and then playing football and baseball, I would usually eat up everything that was on the table (chuckle). We had table waiters

that would set it on the table, and you didn't "cinch" a bowl. You made sure there was enough left for two. In other words, if there was three pieces of meat on the plate, why, you could take one. But if you took two pieces of meat, then you had to get the table waiter because you were "cinching." If there was three pieces of meat on there and you took one, why, you was all right, but if you took two pieces of meat...you could take all you wanted, but if you took two pieces, you had to hold that bowl up, and the table waiter would come get it and fill it back up.

Marcello: So you were served family-style, then, rather than cafeteria-style,

Mason: Yes, we had table waiters. We'd sit down, and our place would be there, and our food would be on the table. Then, like I say, when you emptied a plate, the table waiter would come and get it and fill it up and bring it back to you. But your time would come up, see, for duty as table waiter and K.P. and so on.

Marcello: Now since you did play sports, did this enable you to get any special privileges and so on?

Mason: No, not necessarily. It didn't get me anything. When you played sports back in those days...later on, as I went on in the service, I played sports in the service, and a lot of the players would get off half a day to participate in sports, and they'd lay around and take it easy. But back in those

days, well, you just got off enough time to play your sports. When you was off, they made sure you were playing sports. You were working and training. You weren't out there laying around, goofing off, and take it easy. In other words, when you went down to play football, you was down there. Usually, you would play football until after the...when you came back, the rest of them would already be eating.

Marcello: What time was the typical day over in that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Mason: Oh, my! I know they'd play "Taps" every afternoon. Guys used to run when they'd hear it. They'd run and get under cover so they wouldn't have to stand at attention. But if they caught you, you had to stand at attention. The fact of the business is that I'd see guys drunk and walking across the quadrangle, and the bugler would sound "Taps," and I saw them stand out there and weave. But they'd stand there (chuckle). I don't know...5:00, I guess...I don't know what time "Taps" was, when they lowered the flag.

Marcello: It's "Call to Colors," isn't it? Lowering the colors?

Mason: I forget what it was.

Marcello: "Call to Colors" is in the morning.

Mason: I believe they'd shoot a cannon first. Then when we'd hear that cannon shoot, we'd run and get under cover, see. Then if you were caught out there when the bugle started, you had to stay.

I believe that's the way it was. I believe they'd fire a cannon. Then we'd all scatter and run, and then the bugle would start.

Marcello: What did you do when you got off at the end of the day?

Mason: Oh, we'd lay around and talk and wrestle. Out in the quadrangle--we called it the sally port or something--you know, they had grass in the center, and we'd be out there wrestling. Some would go to the beer garden and get beer for a nickle. You could get a tunafish sandwich for a nickle, I believe it was. Some of them would go drink beer, and some of us would go out and wrestle and might even kick a football around or play a little softball or something like that.

Marcello: How often might you get into Honolulu or one of the other towns in the immediate area of Schofield Barracks?

Mason: Well, Wahiawa was the town that was right off of Schofield Barracks. We went in there a whole lot. We'd usually go into Honolulu once a month. We were making \$21 a month. On the tenth, I believe, you could get PX checks. You could get barber checks. Haircuts cost 35¢. You'd get \$10 worth of PX checks. We'd usually spend those getting things in the PX and drinking beer or something. Then on payday, you'd get paid the other \$11, and usually we'd go into Honolulu then.

Marcello: Now Schofield was a fairly far piece from Honolulu, wasn't it?

Mason: Yes, it was. I don't know, but it seems like it was fifteen

or twenty miles. I forget what it was.

Marcello: And would you have to go up through Kolekole Pass to get into Honolulu?

Mason: No, we'd go in the opposite direction from there.

Marcello: How would you get from Schofield to Honolulu?

Mason: Usually, in a taxi. The taxis were real cheap, and usually we'd go in a taxi. I don't remember, but I think they had busses, too, if I'm not mistaken. It's been so many years, but I believe we'd go in taxis. I know we'd come back in a taxi. Usually, we'd all be drunk (chuckle).

Marcello: You've in part answered my next question, I guess. What would you do when you went into Honolulu?

Mason: Usually, we'd be like all the rest. We'd start hunting women or a drink. Our money wouldn't last long, and then we'd go back. We'd finally end up getting something to eat before we came back.

Marcello: I've heard a lot of people remark that they liked to go into Honolulu just to get something different to eat, that is, opposed to what you got in the mess hall back on base. This does not mean that the military food was bad, but it was good just to have a change.

Mason: Now to some of the older sergeants and older soldiers that had been in it before, maybe the Army food had gotten bad for them. They would like to go in and get something else for a change. For me, I was young and played football and baseball, and I

guess that if you had put anything out there, it was good to me. Some of the older soldiers had gotten tired of it and everything, and they would love to go in and get something else.

Marcello: Did you ever roam around down on Hotel Street or Canal Street?

Mason: Yes, I spent some time there every month, I guess (chuckle).

Marcello: I notice that you didn't get any tattoos, though.

Mason: No, I never did get any tattoos. I always sort of thought that was down-grading yourself to get those things. I don't know why, but a lot of them got them. But I never did get any.

Marcello: Now when you went into Honolulu, would you come back to Schofield the same evening, or would you stay over?

Mason: We came back the same day. I never did stay in unless I stayed up all night. But I never did go in, you know, and get sleeping quarters there. I came back. Myself, I would come back.

Marcello: Why was it that you never stayed over in Honolulu?

Mason: I don't know why I never did stay. My friends that I went with, we'd always go down and usually always make it back.

Marcello: I've heard that in part the military personnel would go back to the base because they couldn't afford to stay in Honolulu. You mentioned that you weren't making very much money.

Mason: I never did check into what it cost. I never did even try to stay, so I imagine that's the way it was. We made \$21,

like I say, and you usually got \$10 on the tenth with PX checks and stuff, and then you'd get paid \$11. Usually, by the time you went down and bought a few drinks and everything, your money was gone, and you'd come back.

Marcello: At the same time, I've also heard that there weren't very many places to stay in Honolulu.

Mason: I never did know anything about that because I never did check into it.

Marcello: Do you recall what your favorite drinking place might have been down there in Honolulu?

Mason: No. We made several of them. I do remember one thing, though. I joined the VFW down there--me and my friends, the ones I had enlisted with. I believe they was in Company D, and I was in Company A.

Marcello: You were in Company A?

Mason: Yes, I was in Company A. I believe we continued going down together, and I believe we joined the VFW down there, but we weren't Veterans of Foreign Wars then. But I think the Veterans of Foreign Wars was lacking in veterans so much that they let us in. Maybe it was because we was overseas. At the time, see, it wasn't a state.

Marcello: I hear a lot of people talk about the Black Cat Cafe. Do you remember that one?

Mason: Yes, I remember it. It seems like it was right there by the YMCA. I was taking to "Duke" Bolen about that place

at the last meeting of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association (chuckle). I'm going to go in that place when I go back this December.

Marcello: What was it that made the Black Cat Cafe so popular?

Mason: Oh, I don't know. It was sort of in the center of things. Sailors went in, and soldiers went in. It seemed like to me that, with as many sailors and soldiers that were there, that they didn't have much trouble between each other when they were there. But there would be a lot of fights between the soldiers and a lot of fights between the sailors, but it didn't seem like the soldiers and sailors fought each other. They didn't have no grudge against each other or something, I guess.

Marcello: Now you also mentioned that from time to time that you would go to a little town closer to Schofield, Wahiawa.

Mason: Wahiawa.

Marcello: What was Wahiawa like? How would you compare it to Honolulu?

Mason: It was just like Honolulu to me, only it was smaller. It had places like Hotel Street over there--same thing.

Marcello: Now it was very, very close to Schofield, wasn't it?

Mason: It was real close--right off the base there.

Marcello: In other words, right there where you spend all your money?

Mason: Yes, You could step out the gate, and you'd be there.

Marcello: I gather, like you say, that there were a lot of bars and souvenir shops and, I guess, cathouses and things like that.

- Mason: Yes, yes, there were lots of them.
- Marcello: I guess you would probably have frequented a place like Wahiawa more than Honolulu because it was closer.
- Mason: Yes, we did because, like I say, a lot of times we didn't have money to go into Honolulu, so we'd just go into Wahiawa--go into the beer gardens and drink beer.
- Marcello: Okay, this brings us, I think, into those...I have one other question I want to ask before we talk about that immediate pre-Pearl Harbor period. How slow or rapid was advancement in rank in that pre-Pearl Harbor Army?
- Mason: Oh, I think you had to spend a hitch...three years in there. Back in those times, you joined the Army for three years, and if you went to the Philippines or Hawaii or Panama or someplace like that, you would get what they called a short discharge. You would spend two years in there, and they would give you credit for three. Usually, it would take you an enlistment, three years, to make Pfc. It was very slow.
- Marcello: Okay, this brings us up to those days and weeks immediately prior to December 7, 1941. Let's go into this particular period in a little bit more detail. As one gets closer and closer to December 7th, and as relations between the United States and Japan continued to get worse, could you detect any changes in your routine?
- Mason: Being young and uneducated...I believe the only time I'd

left Texas was to go up to Oklahoma to go visit one of my mother's brothers. I'd heard some talk about the Japanese being in Washington, but I didn't think anything about it, being like I was. I'll expand on this further when we go into the actual attack because there was something that happened that day that I didn't think I knew.

In other words, when they started bombing that day... the first bomb...I was in the mess hall eating. There was very few of our men that was there that day. One of those men that was there that day was a private, like myself. He was studying to go back to West Point. After the war broke out, he went back to West Point in April of 1942, I believe. I got a letter from him the other day, and he is retired after thirty-four years in the Army--a colonel. I got a letter from him the other day. He and I was together along with a kid named Hobbins. When the first bomb dropped, it shook the barracks real bad. We thought it was Wheeler Field--the Air Force. But we thought they were getting awful close. When the second bomb dropped, we went outside and looked,

Right up there was a Japanese plane banking. He was looking down at me, and I was looking up at him, and I said, "It's the Japanese!" Why I knew it was Japanese, I don't know. Like I say, I was uneducated. I didn't know anything about the world. But I said, "It's the damn

Japanese!" That's the first reaction that I had.

Marcello: And you think in part this may have occurred because of the talk and conversations you'd heard back in Oklahoma when you had visited your uncle?

Mason: Well, I didn't hear the talk there, but the talk I'd heard was after I'd gotten in the Army--about the Japanese being in Washington and talking. I'd heard some of that just through the grapevine--people talking. I guess older Army people would read the paper, but I didn't read the paper at all. They was probably talking about it, and I overheard them.

Marcello: Again, let's get back to your training routine. Could you detect any changes in your routine as one approached December 7th? Let me be a little bit more specific. Were there any alerts or maneuvers that took place in that period?

Mason: There were no alerts at all. I know there were no alerts. I never was called out. I know at times they'd call you out just for your training, but I don't remember any alerts like that. Our training was quite heavy there after we returned to duty. We walked over one...you go back over Wahiawa and come out over by the Pali. We went all the way up over that thing, all the way over that mountain. You'd be up on a ridge up on the top of that thing, and it would be but two or three feet wide, and you'd be walking on it.

Marcello: Was the number of sentries ever increased?

Mason: No, it seemed like it was the same from the time I got there right up to December 7th.

Marcello: When you and your buddies sat around and got involved in bull sessions, how much thought did you ever give to the possibility of a Japanese attack?

Mason: We never mentioned it. We never talked about it. I don't ever recall one time that we talked about it. Like I say, I was more or less what you'd call a rookie. The rest of those guys that I was with was rookies, too. Maybe some of the older sergeants and officers might have mentioned it. I do recall about the British and the Canadians fighting the Germans. Now I do recall that. But as far as the Japanese, I don't recall anything.

Marcello: This brings us into that weekend of December 7, 1941. Again, let's go into as much detail as we can. Do you recall what you were doing on that Saturday, December 6, 1941?

Mason: Oh, me! I know on Sunday, December 7th, we were supposed to play the 27th Infantry in football. I was on the football team.

Marcello: Do you recall whether you went into town that day?

Mason: No, I didn't go to town. I didn't get to town. I'll tell you the reason I didn't go--I was broke. That's the reason I didn't go.

Marcello: When would payday have been?

Mason: Well, it was already come and gone. But I was already broke.

See, that was the seventh. I probably went in there on first when I got paid and was already busted and was back in the barracks. I didn't go in at all that weekend. The cooks was there...when you was on duty, nobody broke duty. I didn't remember anybody breaking duty. They was all there. I don't know where the rest of the men were, but there was four, five, six of us in our company that was in the barracks that day. One of them was the fellow that I was talking about, that went back to West Point to become a colonel. He and I were together, and a kid named Hobbins. I remember Hobbins, and then there were two or three more. I don't remember their names or who they were.

Marcello: Did you perchance go to the PX or to a movie that Saturday night?

Mason: Well, no, I don't think so because I was going to play football the next day. I don't think I went to a movie or anything. I think I stayed right in the barracks. I might have listened to the radio. We listened to the radio a whole lot back in those days. I might have listened to the radio and sat around and talked a little bit and went to bed early. I know I was up early the next morning, and was eating breakfast.

Marcello: In general, when men came back from either Honolulu or Wahiawa on a Saturday evening, what kind of shape or condition would they be in?

Mason: Usually, (chuckle) 90 percent of them would be drunk...be pretty

drunk. They was all young soldiers, Most of them we would be...a lot of them we'd have to carry. Some of them would be staggering. Usually, though, they'd wind it up the first part of the month, and then the rest of the month they would soldier and work hard and everything. Then on the first, well, they'd hit it again.

Marcello: Do you recall whether there was much of that kind of activity occurring on that night of December 6th?

Mason: I imagine there was quite a bit of it because, like I say, we weren't looking for nothing, and I know they was all gone. There were very few in the barracks.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that morning of December 7, 1941. Let's try to reconstruct a detailed account of that day. Do you recall what time you got up and what you did at that point?

Mason: I got up quite early that morning. Like I say, I'd gone down to the mess hall to eat, and I was in the mess hall when the attack commenced. I was in the mess hall.

Marcello: Okay, pick up the story at that point. So you're in the mess hall.

Mason: The walls of the barracks were about a foot thick, concrete. Being close to Wheeler Field, all the planes, I think, came over Kolehole Pass and come down over Schofield. When the first bomb was dropped at Wheeler Field, the barracks shook, I mean, real bad.

Marcello: What was your immediate reaction?

Mason: My immediate reaction was that with Wheeler Field being that close, it was the Air Force dropping their bombs somewhere. They didn't do that very often, but that was my first thought. Then the second bomb dropped, and it really shook things real bad. So we went out to look and see what was happening. There was black smoke going up over one wing of that quadrangle. It was going way up in the air--black smoke.

Marcello: Now could you actually see Wheeler Field from where you were?

Mason: No, I was blocked off by the barracks. We were going around to go into this entrance to look. When we did, this Japanese plane came over. He was real low and going slow. He was looking down like this (gesture), and we was looking up at him. I figure if he had been coming that other way, we'd have been dead. But he went on. You could see him with his helmet and everything...goggles and everything. He was looking right down like that, and we was looking up at him. That's when I said, "It's the damn Japanese!"

From that moment on, I got so excited and everything that I don't remember whether there was anymore bombs dropped or not. It seems like there was some strafing, and then there was another plane that come over this way (gesture).

There was some officers' wives, or some non-commissioned officers' wives, in their quarters, and they come over. This one girl--I'd say she was in her twenties--had a baby in a buggy, and she was hollering, "God bless you! God bless you!"

Why she was saying that to us, I don't know. We should have been saying that to her. She had a baby in the buggy. To show you how untrained we were and how unfamiliar with it, well, Hobbins got hold of the buggy and was going to carry it up to the second floor. He grabbed the buggy and liked to have turned it over (chuckle). I said, "Hobbins, there's a baby in there!" We took it up to the second floor.

We come down and our guns were locked...our M-1's was locked in this rifle rack, and we started beating on it with a hammer. It was a great, big ol' strong lock, and we couldn't knock it off. We started loading machine gun bullets. You would put the bullets down in this deal, and then you'd crank it, and it would push them into the ammunition belt. Well, it wouldn't stick them in far enough, so we'd push them in with our fingers.

Then we went out...and we had water-cooled machine guns; we didn't have air-cooled machine guns. We had water-cooled machine guns--held seven pints of water. We tried to stand it up on the antiaircraft mount, and we didn't even have enough sense to sandbag it down. We finally just gave up on that.

My part, compared to Hickam Field and Pearl Harbor, was light--compared to theirs. But it was awful scary there. Wheeler Field had took the brunt of it around me, but the planes were over me.

Marcello: In other words, most of the immediate action that you saw

and observed was actually occurring over Wheeler Field?

Mason: The bombing was there.

Marcello: They wanted to knock out those airplanes.

Mason: Yes, they wanted the airplanes first. I imagine the first place they hit was there because the fighter planes were there. The fighters and fighter-bombers of the Air Force and the infantry go together.

Marcello: How long did you observe those Japanese planes outside the mess hall before you actually swung into action?

Mason: Well, we were running in circles. We really didn't know what to do. There was no sergeants around or nothing. We were really running in circles on what to do. Like I say, we'd go upstairs, and we'd come back downstairs; we'd go upstairs, and we'd come back downstairs. We didn't think about, you know, digging a hole or taking the machine guns and heading in somewhere where we would...now afterwards, after I'd been in the war, I'd have probably got that machine gun and went over to the motor pool and got a vehicle if I would have found one over there. I'd have probably started one somewhere, trying to shoot something down. Being that way, it was...I don't know. We were excited. We were loading machine gun belts awhile, and then we'd try something else. It was just sort of a confused mess. But we was all awful scared and excited,

Marcello: So all this time, then, you were under no supervision, and

nobody was giving you any orders?

Mason: No, nobody was giving us any orders. There wasn't nobody there.

Marcello: Unlike the Navy personnel, you didn't have a particular battle station as such.

Mason: No, we didn't have no battle station.

Marcello: I guess the best thing you could do was simply to stay by the quadrangle there until somebody did come by to give you some orders.

Mason: I stayed right at the company there until I got orders.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that around the same time that you went outside to observe the action over at Wheeler Field, these women were coming by the barracks,

Mason: They were hunting someplace to go where they would have somebody to protect them.

Marcello: Was the dependent housing close by?

Mason: Yes, it was real close by.

Marcello: You mentioned, among other things, that you and your buddy lifted this baby carriage and took the baby and the carriage up on the second floor. Why did you do that? Do you know?

Mason: Well, we just figured that was the best place for it.

Marcello: Did the woman accompany you up on the second floor of the barracks?

Mason: No, she stayed down because there was other men up there. I don't remember right offhand, but I believe we did take her up

there, I believe we did take her up there.

Marcello: How soon was it after all this occurred that you started belting the machine gun ammunition?

Mason: We couldn't get the rifles out of the rack, so we started in on the machine guns. Me and Hobbins had set one up because the planes were...I don't remember how many planes come in over Wheeler Field. Like I say, the second bomb is all I remember, I don't remember whether they dropped two or three bombs after that or what. I can't recall right offhand. But I do remember two real well because on the second one is when we went outside to see.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you and Hobbins got this machine gun. Where did you get it?

Mason: Out of the supply room.

Marcello: How did you get in the supply room?

Mason: Well, I think we busted the door in, if I ain't mistaken, because our supply sergeant wasn't there. I think we busted the door in. But we got in the supply room.

Marcello: Were you and Hobbins among the first to get in the supply room?

Mason: Well, me and Hobbins and the other three or four of us that was there. We all went in there about the same time. It happened so fast. You know, it happened so fast that we didn't...it was really a confused mess.

Marcello: Now when you were belting the machine gun ammunition? Was this before you actually got the machine gun but after you

tried to get your rifle?

Mason: We tried to get the rifles first, but we couldn't get the rifles. So we went into supply. We got the machine gun, and I remember that Hobbins and I carried it outside. We had it on an old metal post, maybe an inch-and-a-quarter, and then it had three legs out on it. You'd stick it in there and then flip a pin. It was an antiaircraft weapon, sort of deal. We used it if your enemy was strafing you.

Marcello: Where did you set it up?

Mason: (Chuckle) We set it up right in front of the barracks. In case they came over the barracks, you know, we could shoot them. We didn't have it sandbagged or nothing. If we'd have shot that thing, it would have just went in every direction. We might have shot ourselves.

Marcello: Did you fire any rounds off with that machine gun?

Mason: No, we didn't fire any off.

Marcello: Again, I'm getting back to the belting of the ammunition. What did you talk about when you were belting the ammunition?

Mason: Well, we didn't say anything. It just wasn't going in far enough, see. Some would go in far enough, and some wouldn't. I thought I was in good shape, but I had blisters all over my hands from pushing this ammunition into the belt. Your fingers... you'd have to take and push it into the belt. It wasn't going in far enough. It would probably have jammed the gun.

Marcello: I have read some stories about the belting of that machine gun

ammunition, and some men evidently were dealing with material so old that the fabric actually was rotten and tore.

Mason: It did. Some of it did. Some of it sure did. Some of it tore. It wouldn't go in far enough, see, and you'd have to hand-push it in there. I don't know how long they hit Wheeler Field there--maybe fifteen minutes, something like that. I don't recall, really,

Marcello: That's pretty accurate. According to the records I've read, everything was over at Schofield by 8:17.

Mason: Yes,

Marcello: And the attack occurred somewhere around 8:00...7:55 or 8:00.

Mason: Yes, it seemed like it to me. I don't recall just how, but I remember the one plane. I remember the one plane so well that I could see him sitting in there looking at me. It's always sort of given me cold chills because I figured, if he'd been coming right at me, I'd have had it.

Marcello: So the attack is now over. Let's say it's about 8:15 or 8:20 a.m. What happened at that point? Was anybody giving any orders?

Mason: No, still. It seemed like it was noon to me before anybody come in and started giving me orders what to do.

Then that night we pulled guard, and it seemed to me like it rained. I could be mistaken. We had full field packs and full gear, and there was a guard every five yards. I

don't remember if it was before we went out there or what, but it seemed like it was raining, and somebody said, "Gas!" And we stayed an hour-and-a-half or two hours with our gas masks on. We pulled guard all that night, all the next day, and I remember that it was a long time before I went to sleep. They took ditch diggers, and they dug trenches. We was over by these officers' quarters, and I remember I went in...it was real muddy and rainy, and I went in, and I went to sleep on the couch. We just got it all muddy and everything. I believe I went to sleep there.

Then is when we started going out in the field, and that's when they took this picture here (shows photograph). I don't know how long after this was over, but this picture here was on the front page of all papers across the country, and it was also in Life magazine.

Marcello: For the tape, you're referring to a newspaper photograph that shows several of the engineers, you included, building some of these emplacements.

Mason: In case the Japanese came back, that was going to be an emergency operating room.

Marcello: Let's back up again. You mentioned that it was noon before you received any orders. Now what happened at that point, that is, when you received orders? What do you do then?

Mason: Well, it seemed like around noon or somewhere in the early afternoon, all the men was back to the company. The officers

were there and everything, and we started getting some sort of organization. We was ordered to get into our full gear, which was...see, our helmets were World War I helmets, and I remember that our uniform was O.D. shirts and khaki pants with leggings. We had the live ammunition, and we was trying to darken up our bayonets and everything. We had chrome bayonets at that time, and we was trying to darken those up. We was in our full field combat gear with live ammunition.

Marcello: Awhile ago you were mentioning the rifle rack or the gun rack, and you were mentioning your M-1. Do you mean an M-1, or were you using the old Springfield at that time?

Mason: Well, they issued us the M-1. Some of them was still using Springfields, but they'd issued us the M-1's just before the war broke out.

Marcello: So you take off for the field in your full pack. Where do you go?

Mason: Well, I can't name the place, but we went northeast. We went up into some canyons or crevices and the trees...eucalyptus trees. We dug underground...everything. We slept underground and everything. We dug back in the bank, and then we put covers over it, and then we threw dirt over that--camouflaged--and we slept inside that.

Marcello: You were doing this most of the rest of that day?

Mason: No, that night, December 7th, we stayed in the barracks. Like I say, we wasn't in the barracks; we were out pulling guard.

We was about five yards apart everywhere. Just every five yards, you'd see a soldier. We stayed out all night long.

Marcello: Describe what it was...in other words, you went out into the field, and you dug some of these emplacements or foxholes or trenches.

Mason: These emplacements and things that we dug were...the next day we were still in the barracks. I mean, we was outside pulling guard, but the next day they took ditch diggers out into the baseball field and the drilling field, and they took these ditch diggers, and they just dug big, long trenches.

Marcello: What did you do that afternoon of December 7th when you went out in the field? Was that when you were digging back into these banks?

Mason: No, that was maybe two days later. That night we started in Schofield Barracks, but we were all outside on the drill field and everywhere pulling guard. We were all loaded down, and we were all five yards apart (chuckle). There'd be one over here and one over there and one everywhere. We were just spread out all over. That again was a dumb thing to do because, I mean, we were all too close. We should have went out... that afternoon, we should have all been in the field.

Marcello: So what did you do that afternoon when you went into the field? Or do you ever go in the field that Sunday at all?

Mason: No, we didn't go that Sunday afternoon. Like I say, we stayed in the barracks. We wasn't in the barracks. We were at the

barracks. We were outside pulling guard.

Marcello: What was it like on guard duty that night?

Mason: You stayed up all night, and as well as I remember, it just rained like the dickens. You couldn't hardly hold your eyes open, and you was there, and you couldn't go...you were scared to go anywhere. You were afraid somebody'd shoot you, so you were wanting to make sure your buddy knew you was there.

Marcello: You mentioned an interesting point. Did you hear a lot of gunfire that evening?

Mason: Oh, dadgum...

Marcello: When I say a lot of gunfire, maybe I need to qualify that. Did you hear shooting that evening?

Mason: Well, maybe sporadic. You'd hear some. It seemed like to me that you'd hear sporadic shooting all day long that day. I don't remember whether I did or not, but it just seemed like it. I don't know.

Marcello: What sort of rumors were going around that evening?

Mason: Well, the worst one was about that gas. I know we kept our danged gas masks on. Now that was probably just in our company alone.

Marcello: Had you ever heard any rumors that the Japanese had invaded or were about to invade?

Mason: No. Like I say, I was a private and a rookie. Now there might have been something going around, but I wasn't in on it. Yes, they did. I do remember that they said they were going to

come back. I remember them saying they were going to come back. Now I do remember that.

Marcello: Did you believe that rumor?

Mason: Well, yes, I did.

Marcello: I guess you had no reason not to believe it, considering what happened.

Mason: (Chuckle) Yes, I believed it for a long time--maybe a week or two.

Marcello: Now you mentioned you did get some sleep that night. Where did you sleep? •

Mason: It seemed like it was a long time before we went to sleep there. I don't remember, but it seemed like it was a long, long time before we went to sleep. I know that when I went in there...I believe it started raining, and we went in there to get out of the rain. We was all muddy and everything. Anyway, we went in there, and I remember I had that stuff on, and I just went to sleep right against the wall. But I don't think I slept very long.

Marcello: When was it that you slept on that sofa in the officers' quarters?

Mason: That's what I mean. That's when we went in there to get out of the rain. They'd dug these trenches, and that dirt was red over there. It had been raining, and it was muddy. We was all muddy and everything, and we went in there to get out of the rain. There was sort of a screened-in porch there

with a couch on it, and we went in there, and we sat down on that. I believe that was the next day or the next afternoon after that, and I remember I went back to sleep there on that couch.

Marcello: This was over at the officers' quarters or the club?

Mason: Over at the officers' quarters, where the officers and their wives lived.

Marcello: Now what did you do in the days following the attack? I think you talked about this briefly awhile ago, but what did you do, let's say, on December 8th and then on the days after that?

Mason: That's when we started building machine gun emplacements and building things for emergency rooms in case they came back. We went all around the island building machine gun nests. When I go back, after forty years, I'm going to look and see if any of them is still there. One place we built one was right out on the beach there in a real nice pretty place, way on the backside of the island. I'm going to see if it's there. I remember one of these scars, that scar right there (gesture)...

Marcello: You're referring to the scar on your wrist and thumb?

Mason: Yes. That's where I was setting the steel, and I cut myself there. I was so mad. I'd been working so much, and I was so tired. I stood up and started cussing and threw that hammer out in the ocean (chuckle). I remember we poured a lot of...and that was seven days a week, sunup to sundown,

and at nighttime you was ready to...you didn't sleep real good. The bedbugs got in stuff in those underground things, and they'd just be alive with bedbugs.

Marcello: Were you simply sleeping on a blanket or whatever was comfortable?

Mason: No, we'd just take lumber and build sort of a bunk right there and put wire on it and throw a G. I. mattress on that thing.

Marcello: About how long were you out there in the field under those conditions?

Mason: We were out there...I never did come in from the field until I left there. I stayed out there all the time until I left. I think they brought in soldiers from the States to Schofield, and we never did go back to Schofield. We just stayed out there in the field until we left. We left and went into Australia and then to New Guinea.

Marcello: How long were you out there in the field then. Was it a matter of months?

Mason: I don't remember just when I left. It was the latter part of 1942, I think, before we went into Australia and into New Guinea.

Marcello: You were there for several months then?

Mason: Yes, I was there maybe six or seven, eight months, something like that.

Marcello: How'd you ever get rid of those bedbugs?

Mason: (Chuckle) We'd just kind of burn them, and you'd get rid of them. Finally, after a little bit, we tore the underground

stuff up and got tents and started sleeping in the tents, and we got rid of them that way. The underground deals were...after we knew the Japanese wasn't coming back, well, we sort of did away with those.

Marcello: After the initial shock wore off, that is, after the first couple or three weeks, did you more or less settle down into some sort of a more normal routine, or did the construction continue?

Mason: No, it continued on. That's one reason why--they kept looking for them to come back for quite a while. It was a long time that we were pouring those pillboxes. I know that six months later I was still pouring them.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that, as a result of the Japanese attack, your whole military career suddenly changed? In other words, those blissful days of the peacetime Army were definitely gone.

Mason: I went from peace to war in a minute, you'd say. You were sitting there eating breakfast peaceful, and then the next minute you was at war. From then on, until I was discharged, it was seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Mason, I think that's probably a pretty good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for taking time to talk to me. You've said a lot of interesting and important things, and I'm sure that researchers will find this information valuable.

Mason: Well, I told it as well as I could remember it. I think lots about my buddies over there that day that got killed, and I thank the Dear Lord for sparing my life. I'm going to go back this year and pay my respects to them.