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Interview with
C. R. Gross
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Oral History Collection

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Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Arlington, Texas

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing C. R. Gross for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on April 8, 1974, in Arlington, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Gross in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was at Hickam Field on December 7, 1941, during the Japanese attack there.

Now 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, your present occupation. Just be very general and brief.

Mr. Gross: I was born in Owen County, Indiana, in 1920 and entered the service from Indiana in 1939 after one year of college. I got out of the service in 1945 and went back to the University of Iowa, where I got my B.A. in economics, and then re-entered the service in 1948 from which I retired in 1962. I am presently working

for the federal government, Office of Economic Opportunity, in Dallas.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you entered the service in 1939?

Gross: Right.

Marcello: Why did you enter the service?

Gross: I suppose there were several reasons, and no doubt economics was one reason. I just couldn't really find myself at that time. I didn't know what I really wanted to do. I had had about two and a half years of National Guard at home, had a taste of military life, some ROTC in college, and thought I would like it, and with the opportunity to go overseas, I thought it would be even more interesting so I just went in.

Marcello: Where did you take your basic training?

Gross: Well, basic training wasn't such a formal thing in those days as it has been since that time. We were . . . the group I was with was perhaps for a month or so in transit before we got to Hawaii. I spent about two and a half months at Mitchell Field on Long Island awaiting transportation to the islands, and, of course, there wasn't much to do with a group like that--I think there was seventy-five of us in this particular group--other than routine details and some drills and things

of this nature. As far as a formal basic program as we know it now and have for the past several years, especially in the Air Corps, it wasn't that formally structured. We did have a period of "basic training" when we did get to Hickam for perhaps six weeks or so.

Marcello: This, I think, seems to be rather standard operating procedure. I know in talking to some former prisoners-of-war and people of this nature, in many cases they went into the service, were sent to the Philippines, for example, and took whatever training they received there in the Philippines without having ever gone through any sort of basic training in the United States.

Gross: This is true. We were what was called "Air Corps Unassigned," having joined the Air Corps. This would have held true for any other branch of service. "Air Corps Unassigned" (Hawaiian Department). We were considered pipeline types in today's terms until we arrived in Hawaii, and our permanent assignment was there, and it was the responsibility of the Hawaiian Department at that time to provide the major portion of basic training that we got.

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

Gross: Shortly before I entered, I made inquiries from an Air Corps Technical School at Chanute Field around ~~Rantoul~~ and Champaign, Illinois. The Air Corps, even then as today, had an extensive technical training program. I had inquired about some of them, and I think I had made tentative plans to go to a school on photography.

My plans were changed when I dropped in the local post office at home and thought I would laugh at the recruiting sergeant, bait him a little bit, and give him the idea that I was a good prospect and then say, "Well, okay, sarge, nice talking to you, but I've already got my deal all wrapped up." I didn't realize that they had such terrific salesmen among their recruiting forces. So I have yet to go to Chanute Field.

Marcello: At the time that you entered the service, did you have any idea that the country perhaps was on its way towards war? Did this thought ever enter your mind as a young man? How old were you at the time? Nineteen? Twenty?

Gross: I was nineteen, virtually nineteen and a half. Of course, Europe broke out on September 1, 1939, and

some of my friends and I, especially in the National Guard unit there, talked about going to Canada and joining up at that time. Now this was just a lot of kid talk, you know, and I guess my mother came within about two inches of breaking my arm if I even talked about it. But, yes, we realized that there was a war going on. We certainly didn't anticipate that we would become involved in the way that we did, but I don't think that many of us would have doubts that we would become involved ultimately.

Marcello: What were your reactions when you found out that you were going to Hawaii?

Gross: Well, this was voluntary. I enlisted for Hawaii. It was no surprise.

Marcello: Why did you volunteer for Hawaii? Did you conjure up the visions of a tropical paradise or something of this nature?

Gross: Like I told you, I stopped in to talk to that recruiting sergeant (laughter).

Marcello: So you volunteered for Hawaii. When did you finally arrive there?

Gross: I got there March 20, 1940.

Marcello: And did you proceed immediately to Hickam Field? Was this where you were assigned?

Gross: Yes. We left . . . of course, all travel was by ship at that time. I was on the old U.S. Army transport Republic.

Marcello: That Republic must have plied that route between San Francisco and Honolulu many, many times because a bunch of my prisoners-of-war traveled that Republic to the Hawaiian Islands and then took it on to Brisbane, Australia.

Gross: As a matter of fact, I got on that Republic in Brooklyn and went through the Panama Canal, to San Francisco, and then to Honolulu. So, yes, it was a pretty busy one.

Marcello: And it didn't move too fast, did it?

Gross: It was five days from San Francisco over, which was . . . no, let's see. I guess it was seven days, and the commercial liners took about five. We were four weeks getting from Brooklyn going through Panama, but we spent, I believe, three or four days in San Francisco. It wasn't all that unpleasant a trip. The Republic had much better accommodations than many of the ships did. Our bunks, for example, were only two deep, where some of them were four or five deep, you know, and we had mattresses and sheets, where they had

just the plain old canvas cots there and so on. So we rode fairly comfortably. I think at that time, with all the transports that the Army had, I recall hearing that the Army actually had more ships than the Navy did--transports and tugs and things of this nature.

So we got there in March of 1940 and were taken from the docks out to Hickam in this old beat-up, narrow gauge Hawaiian railroad. That was to be our home then. Hickam was a brand new base at that time. It had been opened, I think, about six or seven weeks.

Marcello: Well, describe what Hickam looked like from a physical standpoint.

Gross: Well, they had some of the permanent buildings in--the one permanent barracks which was a huge thing with the big mess hall in the center and then, I think, three wings coming out on each side. It housed all of the 5th Bomb Group and housed all of the air base group. I believe there must have been eight or ten squadrons within this one barracks building. Most of the family quarters had been completed . . . I mean . . . I guess all of them had, as a matter of fact. There were many families there on the base. The clubs were of permanent construction. We still had some of the two-story,

old-fashioned barracks in some of the temporary areas. I recall the gymnasium we had was an old wooden structure with open sides, and in the evenings they put chairs out there, and that was our theater. The BX and headquarters building, you know, and the hangars and operations buildings and so forth were all completed. I think it was a very nice place because, as I say, it was brand new. I think it became operational on February 1, 1940, and we got there in late March. Other than those certain areas which were of temporary nature, it was very fine.

Marcello: To what unit were you assigned when you got to Hickam Field?

Gross: Well, we were sort of in limbo while we were going through this basic training, and then we were split up and sent to various units. I was sent to the 5th Bomb Group. I don't recall how assignments were made to the various squadrons, but I wound up in the Headquarters Squadron. My initial assignment was in the G-2 or Intelligence Office. I don't recall when I went to the squadron when this training period was over--probably mid-May, something like that.

Then I was sent to a clerical school at Wheeler Field, which was up near Schofield. I was there, I think, six weeks. I came back in late July or early August.

At about this time, there were some notices put out that the finance detachment at Hickam was expanding, and anyone interested in transferring to this finance section was asked to come down and talk to them. This was the outfit that I'd wanted to be in ever since I'd been in the service. So I went down and talked to the finance officer, and in a few days I, in fact, was accepted. We were all accepted on a trial basis more or less. It was sometime in early or mid-August that I transferred, actually, out of the Air Corps into the Finance Office at Hickam in 1940.

Marcello: I don't quite understand this. You transferred out of the Air Corps into the Finance Office?

Gross: Yes. The Finance Department was a separate branch of the service. When I joined the service in late 1939, the Army was expanding quite a bit. Up until this time, I think it's strength was about 186,000 men total. As I recall, in the Finance Department, to service

186,000 men they had 650 men. In 1940, they doubled the strength of the Finance Department, and they went to 1,300. On September 16, 1940, the Draft Act was passed. Of course, the build-up began in earnest at this time, and this accounted for the additional vacancies being created in the Finance Office. I know when I went into the Finance Office, there was a . . . we had a major there as finance officer, and there were six men. They were about to lose one, and they brought in seven of us new ones, so the strength of that office doubled.

Marcello: Did you have a different kind of uniform and things of this nature then when you went from the Air Corps into the Finance Department?

Gross: No, it was still Army. We had different insignia. Instead of the wings and propeller, we had the little diamond-shaped insignia. That was about it. Our uniforms were about the same, and everything else about it was the same. It was just like transferring from infantry into artillery. We just moved from one branch to another, but it was at one of the service units, and, of course, we could have been assigned to any post where any type of combat unit may be assigned. We just

happened to be on an Air Corps base because we were there to begin with primarily.

Marcello: Why did you decide to transfer into the Finance Department? Did you not like your previous job, or was this work in the Finance Department more or less along the lines that you desired?

Gross: It was much more along the lines I wanted. I didn't really feel I was accomplishing anything in this group Intelligence Office. In combat there might have been something there, but under the conditions we were under then, it didn't amount to anything more than plotting the movements of the China clippers and the Matson ships that, you know, the commercial jobs that went to the West Coast to Hawaii. We'd get the notices of arrivals and departures in the paper each day. We had a map up there where we drew in these ships and planes, and I didn't consider that a very big deal, really. I had studied some accounting in college, and this was more the type of work I was interested in and the type of thing that I liked to do. I had quite a flair for it. I worked with figures quickly and easily and so on. This was just something I'd wanted to do.

Marcello: I assume that with one year of college, among your peers you were probably an exception rather than the

rule. One year of college was a substantial amount of education at that time, I should think.

Gross: Of those who came into the service at the time I did, several of them had college backgrounds, so among my contemporaries, that would probably not be the case. As far as the Army as a whole was concerned, I guess I had probably gone farther than the average GI.

Marcello: Now you got over there to the Hawaiian Islands in early 1940, so you were there almost two years actually before war actually broke out or before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. During this period, were you keeping up with world events, and were you particularly keeping abreast with news from the Pacific so far as relations between the United States and Japan?

Gross: I remember keeping better informed on the war in Europe than in diplomatic negotiations between the United States and Japan. As you know, news accounts of an ambassador called upon a secretary of state or something of this nature doesn't just make you tingle.

Marcello: Even as a historian, I find diplomatic history extremely boring. We usually refer to it as "treaties and telegrams."

Gross: We, of course, kept in pretty close touch with, oh, you know, the German invasion of Russia and hearing

rumors about some Russian saying that when they get to this line, they're going to stop, and sure enough, they did. We used to kid all the Italians in our outfit that we were going to get a Greek to take care of them if they didn't shape up and this type of thing, you know. No, I don't recall being overly concerned or following very closely the maneuvering between Japan and the United States.

Marcello: Would it be safe to say, without putting words in your mouth, that most eyes were turned toward Europe, and the thought of war with the Japanese was a rather remote thing in the minds of most of the servicemen there on Hawaii?

Gross: As far as I would know, yes.

Marcello: You were there for two blissful years before war broke out. Let's talk a little bit about the social life that a young enlisted man might be able to take advantage of on the Hawaiian Islands. What was social life like on the Hawaiian Islands?

Gross: Well, it was a bit limited.

Marcello: Oh, I don't want to hear that [sarcasm]! I can't believe that!

Gross: The percentages were not in our favor. Let's put it that way.

I was more fortunate than most. I had a very good friend in the Finance Office who was married, and his wife was over there. They had quarters on the base, and he invited me down to his place quite often. I think it all started because he wanted someone to help him work in his yard, and that was a better offer than I had lying around the barracks, and so I was willing to work in the yard, and so we became very close, and we spent a great deal of time with each other. Now this dates from early 1941, I would say. It was just routine that I went down to their place two or three times a week, and oftentimes on weekends I would spend the night there. He was a great music fan and so was I. We collected records together and cleaned house and what have you. They had no children at the time, and his wife worked on the post. I think she worked in the Quartermaster Office at one time. So my social life was pretty much dependent on theirs. They'd have me down a lot of times when they'd have friends come out. I didn't really terrorize the place like a lot of the local young Joe's did. Not that I wasn't beyond going out with them on occasion-- I don't mean that--but the social life wasn't the

great attraction of the island at that time for a single man.

Marcello: How often were you able to get leave or liberty while you were there at the Hawaiian Islands? In other words, when you were finished at the end of the day, were you free to go into town or do what you wished?

Gross: Yes.

Marcello: This was almost automatic?

Gross: Well, as I recall, after we completed our training, we were assigned to an organization, and we got the Class A pass. Now with the Class A pass, we could leave the post anytime we were not on duty. There was no curfew or nothing just as long as we made roll call the next morning. We were pretty big boys, and they treated us like big boys.

Marcello: This more or less would take care of most of the general background material, and I think at this stage we can probably move up to the few months immediately before the actual Japanese attack took place. Let's talk first of all about the island's Japanese population. Now, of course, there was a tremendously large Japanese population on the Hawaiian Islands at that time. As we got closer and closer to

war, what sort of concern did all of these Japanese present to the military on the Hawaiian Islands?

Gross: You've got to remember, Ron, that at the time the war started, I was a private first class. I was also in a noncombatant organization, and the Finance Detachment was a very elite group in many respects. We were quartered by ourselves. We had no responsibilities as far as guard duty or KP or anything of this nature was concerned. Of course, in those days, everything was done manually. We had no computers or any mechanical aids at all in the computation of payrolls, and the payrolls were our big function, you see. Everyone was paid up to the penny each month. During payroll season, of course, we'd go night and day, and then when time slacked off, we slacked off, too. We might take turns taking a couple of days off in the middle of the month or something like this. So what I'm trying to say is that at my level, of course, I was not privy to any of this strategic or tactical concerns at the moment. Our organization was not concerned with them at the time, so I really can't answer you.

I personally felt no concern as far as the population was concerned because there was such a

mixture in Hawaii as there is today. You had everything there, and there was no prejudice. You never saw any discrimination in terms of anyone being refused service or accommodations or anything of that nature because of racial background or what have you. I guess that's because, according to sociologists, you have more than two groups there, and I think there and in Brazil is where there's supposed to be the least prejudice of all. So I really don't know of any concern as far as the Japanese element was concerned.

Marcello: Let me take another tack then. Did you notice that at Hickam Field how all of the planes were usually always lined up in nice, neat rows as we get closer and closer and closer to war? Did you perhaps make this observation?

Gross: Yes, but I thought nothing about it.

Marcello: Well, of course, the point is, they were lined up in nice, neat rows because of the danger of sabotage or some sort of fifth columnist activity. It was felt that it would be much easier to guard those planes if they were in nice, neat rows. Obviously, later on, they made beautiful targets for the Japanese pilots when they came in.

Gross: I saw this and heard this theory expounded in movies, and that was the first time I ever heard this discussed. I'm not saying this isn't true because I think that Tora Tora was a very authentic movie in most respects, and that may have very well have been the case. It was not something that anyone at my level would have been concerned with. We would have wondered what was going on if anything had been done probably.

Marcello: Okay, then, at your level there was really no talk or no concern about what the Japanese civilian population on the islands might do in case of war.

Gross: Well, there might have been some off-hand remarks in bull sessions but nothing that would indicate any major concern.

Marcello: Were there very many Japanese-Americans that worked on the base, that is, as civilian personnel? Here again, you may not have been able to tell a Japanese from a Chinese or maybe even from a native Hawaiian.

Gross: Well, I couldn't tell from sight. I got to the point where I could tell by their name. We had probably the largest facility there for civilian employees on the island, which was the Hawaiian Air Depot. Well,

probably not as much as Pearl Harbor, no, but we did, of course, process the payroll for that Hawaiian Air Depot, and I knew there were many oriental names. I never saw them. They were just names to me. As a matter of fact, I saw the names primarily because I spent quite a while as a check writer there in the place, and I used to write their checks, but I got to be pretty good at spelling oriental names, and I became well acquainted with some of the unusual spellings and so on. Other than that, I never gave it a thought.

Marcello: Let's talk about another subject then, the Pacific Fleet, which, of course, ultimately was the major target the Japanese wanted to find at Pearl Harbor. Describe what the fleet activities were like at Pearl as best as you can remember. Here again, you weren't in the Navy, but obviously you must have been in a position whereby you may have been able to observe the fleet from time to time or the activities taking place there.

Gross: Well, I'm sure you know the only thing that separated Pearl Harbor from Hickam Field was a chain link fence about six or eight feet high. There were several places

where you could crawl under that chain link fence and go from one to the other without going out to the road and taking four or five miles to get from one place to another, you know. None of us had cars at that time, and we used to crawl through that fence many times and go over to see what movies the various ships had. They just put up a screen out on the deck, you know, and at night they would show a movie, and you could just walk up and down the area there and see what they had on and stop in and see a movie. We used to like to visit people in the fleet over there. We used to go over and ask to go through the ships and this type of thing. We used to be in a position, of course, where we could see them coming and going because the channel at Pearl Harbor was right down at the end of Hickam.

As far as what we knew about what the fleet was doing and the activities and so on, all we knew was what we read in the papers, really, and, of course, this was news over there because it would have been the Navy operation, and Pearl Harbor was a major element in the scene of Oahu. I just didn't really know any more about it than that and had no real thoughts on it one way or the other.

Marcello: How hard was it, let us say, for a civilian to gain access to these naval facilities. In other words, was it easy for him simply to walk on that facility and inspect the ships or to observe the ships, or was this a restricted area?

Gross: No, I don't think they could have done so. I know that there were certain places where we had to show our ID, and once we did that . . . I don't remember for sure, but I think that there were several places there where we had to be in uniform, not just have the proper ID. I don't recall at this time. . . of course, those places may have been . . . maybe to go on a ship you had to be in uniform. I don't recall. I think there were some areas where an ID card just wasn't enough.

Marcello: How about tourists? Did you ever see any extraordinary amount of tourist activity around the military facilities there perhaps in the form of tour boats, things of this nature, that might be able to get fairly close to Pearl?

Gross: No, I never saw anything of that nature. I don't know if there were any.

Marcello: Now we're getting closer to war. If you can remember

back, what did you think, personally, about the chances of a surprise attack coming from the Japanese?

Gross: It never entered my mind. I never thought about it. If I had thought about it, I'm sure I would have felt there would have been a chance of it happening in the Philippines, perhaps, or some of the island chains, but to come to Hickam or Pearl Harbor, I would have never given it a thought.

Marcello: Was this, generally speaking, the attitude of most of your buddies, also?

Gross: I would assume so. It was something that I never heard anyone mention.

Marcello: I think this is important. If you didn't hear anybody mention it, quite obviously they really didn't think about it that much.

Gross: Yes, this is what I mean.

Marcello: What was your opinion of the Japanese themselves? You know, when you thought of the typical Japanese, what sort of a vision did you conjure up in your own mind?

Gross: You mean as an individual?

Marcello: Yes, as an individual.

Gross: Well, I don't know that I ever thought of them as . . . just as a Japanese, you know. We thought of orientals, and, of course, we used the term "Gooks" as they did throughout the Pacific for years to come after that. I never got to the point--and I can't today--where I could differentiate between many of the orientals. If a Japanese walked into this room, I couldn't tell you whether he was Japanese or Chinese or Filipino or what have you. These are things that I just never give much thought to, and I never have tried to learn distinguishing characteristics of this nature. I don't think I had any real stereotyped conception of what a Japanese was.

Marcello: Did you think of them as basically being a backward-type people who tried to imitate western technology and things of this nature?

Gross: I recognized the fact that they had copied a lot of their technology. I knew this. Of course, up to this point, you know, they had attained quite a bit of military success, so I don't think I would have looked upon them as being backward in any way. I think I respected them from that point of view. Mind you, I'm not telling you now what I know to be my

thoughts at that time. I'm telling you, I guess, what my thoughts are now, probably for objective facts, trying to base them upon what I knew at that time.

Marcello: Well, this is interesting, I think, and let me ask you this. Now suppose, for example, that we were to get into some sort of a war with the Japanese. If you can think back to that period--now I want you to project yourself back to that period again--do you think it was your opinion and the opinion of most of your buddies that it would be a pretty short war and that we could take care of them pretty easily?

Gross: Yes, I think generally we felt that way. I recall specifically that in one of Walter Winchell's columns about that time, he made the statement that the Japanese Navy wouldn't last six weeks against the Pacific Fleet. Of course, he was a reserve naval officer, and I thought that gave him all kinds of credibility you see (chuckle). I probably felt that we could make a pretty short work of them. I hope we don't lose this train of thought because I have some very strong feelings about this concept, as far as the attack itself is concerned, when we get to that point.

Marcello: As we get closer and closer and closer to war, what sort of precautions or preparations did you observe

or did you take part in around Pearl or around Hickam Field? In other words, what sort of alerts were held, or what sort of maneuvers did you have, and what sort of rumors were going around and things of this nature?

Gross: It was a pretty active period of time, and once again I must remind you that I was in a noncombatant unit, but we knew what was going on. There were alerts being called all the time, but they wouldn't affect us necessarily, you see. Now I don't know what your time frame is now, but I recall specifically the afternoon of December 6, when my friends and I were leaving the post and going downtown. This is Bill and Mildred Goodwin. I've never mentioned their names, but these were the people who were there with whom I spent so much time. We saw an antiaircraft unit coming on the base. I believe it was from Fort Shafter. We remarked about the fact that this was another stage in the overall alerts that had been so prevalent in the past few weeks and didn't think much about it. They came on base and set up in different positions, you know. They were strictly on a wartime footing, it appeared, in all respects. This was the afternoon of December 6.

Marcello: What form did these alerts take? In other words, what were the procedures involved here?

Gross: I really don't know because the direct effect these alerts had were more pronounced with the combat arms, the ground troops and so on, you see. Now as far as the Air Corps was concerned even, they didn't get involved to a great extent. If they sent out some crews on some extensive patrols or something like this . . . well, you know, we had a ten-man crew on a B-17. We had even fewer than that on old B-18's. The ground crews, you know, prepare the planes and so forth. We in the support units there were not involved in any way. As far as the ground defense is concerned at Hickam--and I'd suppose at Wheeler--this was not an element that was a big thing as far as an alert was concerned. I understand now that the infantry troops at Schofield and the other combat types were deployed at various places around the island and were on a wartime basis, and they could tell you more about it. I really don't know.

Marcello: What sort of rumors were circulating during this period, let's say right up until December 6, 1941? What sort of rumors did you hear about the possibility of attack

or of some sort of attack or war with the Japanese or anything of this nature?

Gross: Nothing! Certainly nothing concerning an attack. As far as eventually being at war was concerned, I think we all felt that if it came, it would come through Europe, that we would become involved in Europe. At this time, they were having the Atlantic Charter, and they were involved in trading a bunch of destroyers for island places in the Atlantic, you see, and we didn't really see much going on at all as far as we were concerned. Now it was very shortly before December 7--and the time frame I can't tell you--within a month at least, we had several B-17's coming through on secret orders. Now, of course, you know, this is 1941 and it was a big thing. It was a big thing at that time to go down and watch an airplane land that had flown all the way from the West Coast nonstop. The first ones that come over there, boy, I'll tell you, we were lined up on that runway from one end to the other because this was pretty historic, you see! The novelty of airplanes landing on a nonstop flight from the West Coast was still with us at that time. In any case, we were processing several crews who came

through with secret orders. Now we saw these when they came into Finance because they had various problems as far as the pay was concerned, and they were, of course, entitled to per diem and this type of thing, so all of us at my level, of course, would work up the documentation and make the computations and so on, but the secret orders, we never saw, except that they indicated that the destination was PLUM. We surmised later that the code word PLUM meant somewhere in India. I don't know if that was ever . . .

Marcello: I think you surmised wrong. I think it was the Philippines.

Gross: Was it the Philippines?

Marcello: Yes. A bunch of the prisoners-of-war that I interviewed were also a part of Operation PLUM, and they were all on their way to the Philippines.

Gross: I bet you talked to them before you did me (laughter).

Marcello: I sure did.

Gross: You know, I've wondered for a long time just exactly where PLUM is, but we met many of those as they came through. I'll never forget that the secret destination was PLUM.

So activities were picking up, of course. We could see this. You might get half a dozen B-17's

coming through, and this isn't a major thing. This is not going to tip the balance of power one way or the other, especially when you don't even know where they're going. It's not going to influence your thinking a great deal. No, the thought of an attack by the Japanese never entered my mind.

Marcello: This brings us up now to December 6, 1941. At this point, I want you to recall as best you can your routine on the day of December 6 and especially on the night of December 6, 1941. I think this is a very important day in setting the stage for the seventh.

Gross: December 6, of course, was a Saturday. Now at this time, we had built up the strength of the island considerably during the year and a half I had been there to the extent that paydays got to be quite a hassle, so we had staggered paydays. Now we at Hickam paid all Air Corps troops on the island. I learned later that we had agent finance officers on various islands throughout the Pacific, and our office actually lost money at Wake. I don't mean that we had a finance officer out there, but an officer out at Wake had additional duty of being an agent to our man to take care of finance functions. I don't know

where all we did have these, but in any case, we were deeper involved than I knew about. In any case, I recall that payday for the Air Corps was designated to be the tenth day of the month which, of course, would have been the Wednesday of the following week. We also paid Fort Kamehameha, which was adjacent to Hickam Field, and I believe their payday was supposed to be the seventh. In those days, if your payday fell due on Sunday, you got paid on Monday. So on the sixth, we had everything pretty well wrapped up as far as the November payroll was concerned. The Fort Kamehameha payroll, of course, was all completed, and we had gone through all we had to go through in the pay section to get the Air Corps payroll completed, and then it was a matter of writing checks and getting the last of the details picked up.

So we'd come through another one of those hectic periods and were in a breathing spell once again. I don't remember any specific activities during the day of December 6, but I remember that evening Bill and Mildred Goodwin and I went downtown, as I mentioned to you.

Marcello: Apparently then, on December 6, you'd had a pretty hectic day.

Gross: Not on the sixth.

Marcello: Not on the sixth?

Gross: Leading up to the sixth. As I said, on the sixth we were over the hump, and it was a pretty relaxed day on the sixth. So we went downtown that evening, and Mildred was going to buy some material to slip-cover a couch that she had, and Bill and I went with her. Of course, he and I managed to get down to the record shop because we never went downtown without buying three or four records at least. We had a pretty good collection.

On that evening we bought a parakeet. I don't remember what we named it. Everything else about that bird sticks in my mind except the name.

In any case, none of us had a car. We always rode the bus to and from town, you see. We had this big package of whatever the material was that she'd bought, and we were carrying this bird cage and a bird cage stand. Then we came back home.

Well, we got back home, you know, at a reasonable hour. I don't know, maybe ten o'clock or something like that. She got started on those slip covers, and she's one of those people who never do want to quit

once she got started, so he and I was just sitting there playing records and having a couple of drinks and enjoying ourselves while she was working away on this thing. I'm sure it was at least 2:00 or 2:30 or so before we finally called it a day and went to bed. This was the nature of the activities that we had on the evening of the sixth.

Marcello: Let me ask you this question at this point. Was Saturday night in Hawaii usually a period of fun and games for most of the personnel on the military installations for the most part?

Gross: Well. . .

Marcello: What I'm leading up to is this. It seems to me that if there was going to be a good time for the Japanese to attack, a Sunday morning would have been an ideal time under most circumstances.

Gross: Yes, I think that's right.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were up on this particular Saturday, or Sunday morning actually, until 2:00 or 2:30. For you, was this more or less a routine procedure on a weekend?

Gross: Well, I don't know if I stayed up till 2:00 or 2:30 every weekend, but to stay up later than normal on a weekend was not uncommon.

Marcello: And usually I would assume that for most people, especially who went into Hawaii--young and single--they hit all the bars and so on on Hotel Street. A lot of times when they came back either to Hickam Field or to Pearl Harbor itself, they weren't in very good fighting trim. They may have been in fighting trim, but not the kind of fighting trim to handle an air attack or something of this nature.

Gross: I think it's safe to say that would have been the condition prevailing for many of them, yes.

Marcello: So you called it a day or night at 2:00 or 2:30 a.m., and this would have been actually December 7, 1941, and I assume that you went back to your barracks.

Gross: No, I spent the night there.

Marcello: Oh, I see. You spent the night with the Goodwins.

Gross: Yes, as I did quite often. Of course, at 8:00 the next morning, I think it was 7:55 officially, we were awakened. The first thing that came to my mind was this antiaircraft outfit that they had put on base the day before. I heard a lot of antiaircraft fire. I couldn't imagine what in the world was going on! I knew that the island was under a general state of alert, and that a lot of the troops were on alert in

bivouac positions and so on. I just thought this was a very unreasonable time to start anything like this, particularly on a Sunday morning. I didn't bother to get up. I tried to hide my head under the pillow and tried to drown out some of the noise, and I just stayed there.

Marcello: Could you hear airplanes?

Gross: I don't recall. I don't see how I could not have heard them. I remember the gunfire more than . . . that was what I heard most.

Marcello: In other words, you couldn't hear any explosions from bombs or anything of this nature, or if you did hear them, you couldn't distinguish what they were.

Gross: Right. Shortly, I heard Mildred getting up. I thought, "I hope she goes back to bed because she's going to get Bill up pretty soon. When he gets up, then I get up and here we go again." She was talking in a very excited manner. I couldn't make out what she was saying. She didn't seem to be real worried about things. She was talking as though, "Boy, they're putting on a great show out there!" You know, the tone of voice led me to believe this was the nature of her talk.

Marcello: Now how close were you to Hickam Field actually at this time?

Gross: We were on Hickam Field.

Marcello: I see.

Gross: We were down at the place . . .

Marcello: How close were you to the runway or where the planes were?

Gross: That would be hard for me to guess. I would say we were probably a half-mile from the runway, but I'll tell you, we could stand in Bill's yard and throw a rock over the fence into Pearl Harbor. He was right across the fence from the Marine barracks. I've heard since that time that one of the first units to get in action was from the Marine barracks, so I guess we were about as close to the initial action as we could have gotten.

Marcello: In other words, you were actually closer to the action of Pearl than what you were to the action at Hickam Field?

Gross: Yes. We were way over to the side of Hickam Field. So anyway, she might have got him out of bed (chuckle), and he took a look out the window, and the next thing I knew he came bursting through my bedroom door, and

he said, "Gross, what's the insignia on a Japanese plane?" He had a look of shock on his face that I had never seen on it before. I said, "Well, they have the rising sun on their wings and fuselage where we have the star. Why?" And he said, "Get up, dammit! They're here!"

Well, I thought he was crazy, but I got up in my BVD's, and I ran out in the front yard (chuckle), and just as we got out the initial attack was just pulling off, and they were flying in beautiful formation. I never was a very good judge of altitude, but I'd say they must have been 8,000 to 10,000 feet high. They were directly over Pearl and leaving. There was this tremendous antiaircraft barrage that was 2,000 or 3,000 feet below them and not doing them a bit of good. We were pretty well convinced that we were under attack. There was no doubt about it at that time. Smoke was pouring up from a lot of the facilities on Hickam as well as over Pearl.

Marcello: What were your own thoughts when you saw all of this? Were you finally beginning to fathom what was taking place?

Gross: Oh, I knew what was taking place (chuckle). I really didn't know what to do about it. It was one of those things like, "Holy mackerel! What do I do now?" type of thing, you know.

Marcello: Did you get a feeling of panic, perplexity, fear, anger, confusion?

Gross: The one thing that sticks in my mind was, "I've got to get in uniform." The only thing that I had . . . you see, I'd been in civilian clothes the night before, and I'd spent the night down there, and I was concerned about getting in uniform. So Mildred had a little bicycle that she liked to ride around the base over there, you know. I jumped on that bicycle, and I rode that thing back up to our barracks and went in and got in uniform.

Marcello: What was the situation on Hickam and around your barracks when you got there?

Gross: Well, it was, I guess, probably the best example of mass confusion I've ever seen. None of our people had left the barracks or had panicked or had just taken off. They were quite excited about what was going on, and they were interested in seeing as much as they could and so on and trying to figure out what was going on. Now we had no combat mission, you

understand. We really didn't know what to do or where to go or what have you. So the only place we had to go, in fact, was the Finance Office, you don't fight too good a war from the post headquarters building, you know (chuckle).

So anyway, I got into uniform. Just to show you how silly you can be at times and how silly the thoughts are that can run through your head, I was concerned because I didn't have on a tie. Now I had never seen a man in uniform without a tie up until that time. I'd been in the service more than two years. There was no such thing as the open collar uniform in those days. So I buttoned my collar without a tie (chuckle), and we started over to the headquarters building.

Marcello: What did the base itself look like? Obviously, you perhaps weren't too particularly observant at this time, but what was the extent of the damage that you could ascertain?

Gross: Well, we could see the runway from our barracks, and we couldn't actually distinguish any individual planes or anything of this nature, but you could see the smoke, the black wall of smoke, that you knew was

the gasoline and oil fire and this type thing. We knew the damage was extensive. I could see down at the end of the base, the old Hawaiian Air Depot area. As a matter of fact, from Goodwin's house window I had seen that. This was the first thing I noticed from the damage--from what we called H.A.D., Hawaiian Air Depot.

You're right. I didn't take very much time to see what the nature of the damage was. We started over toward the headquarters. About midway between our barracks and headquarters was post exchange. I got that far when the second attack came back in.

Marcello: In other words, you were somewhere out in the open?

Gross: Yes. Well, the post exchange wasn't exactly in the open, but I wasn't where I wanted to be. Some of our guys just stopped in the post exchange to get a cup of coffee on the way over there (laughter).

Marcello: That apparently indicates that there wasn't a whole lot of panic or confusion.

Gross: We heard later--I don't know if this is true or not--that the original plans for Hickam Field called for the headquarters building to be where the post exchange was eventually located. There had been some changes along the way.

Marcello: And the oil storage tanks were supposed to be where the baseball diamond was, isn't that correct? Anyway, the Japanese, I think, bombed the hell out of that baseball diamond in thinking that there were some underground oil tanks there or something.

Gross: But in any case, they worked over the PX pretty well on their next go-round. Several of us were there.

Marcello: Well, you might describe precisely what took place during this period then.

Gross: Well, the PX was sort of a U-shaped building, although the angle of the base and the two wings was more than ninety degrees, if you know what I mean. The main store was on one side, and the cafeteria and snack bar was on the other side and opposite it, and the restrooms and so forth were on the base side. Now I don't recall where I was when the thing started, when they came back, but I remember we were trying to find anyplace where we could find a place to hide. I know that at one point in time I was curled up under the wash basin in the ladies' restroom. I don't know how long I was there, how long I had stayed there.

Marcello: In other words, you didn't get outside at all to take a look at the action?

Gross: No, sir (chuckle). That was something I was not particularly anxious to see. We had one of these big walk-in coolers there, you know, refrigerated areas. I know that some of the guys went in there, and they were killed in there by concussion. I don't recall now how it works, and I don't know whether they had the doors closed or slightly ajar or what have you, but in any case, they never came out. There were several who were wounded in this particular point in time. I know one of the men in our outfit, Marvin Wingrove, who hails from Tucumcari, New Mexico, and whom I got in contact with in late 1972 just before I was going to the convention in New Orleans, and he was flying helicopters in Thailand. He was in the snack bar drinking coffee, and he got a piece of shrapnel in the calf of his leg, and they had to carry him out because he couldn't walk with that shrapnel in there.

I got a piece of shrapnel through my left shoulder, two holes about an inch apart, but they didn't hit the bone or anything. This, I think, was while I was outside lying up against the building. I didn't even know I'd been hit.

Anyway, the thing let up very shortly, and we got on over to headquarters, except Wingrove, who was picked up in an ambulance and taken to the hospital.

Marcello: How long did it seem to you that that attack took place? To you, not in actual time.

Gross: Well, I don't remember, but I remember this one plane that looked like he was coming right at me, and I remember that as he started strafing, I saw the shells going [sound] right across the ground, you know, just like they did in the movie From Here to Eternity. And I thought, "Holy mackerel! This is it!" I was out there at the side of the building, lying down at the side of the building.

Marcello: Now this was almost immediately after the second attack that that occurred, and you were still caught on the outside yet.

Gross: This was during the second attack. Now I was behind . . . I was under some bushes, actually under some hedges, you know, shrubbery around there. I don't know what happened, whether he quit firing or whether . . . one hit in front of me, and one hit up on the wall behind me, but nothing ever came of it.

Marcello: They were pretty close though?

Gross: I've never felt that my time was as short as it was when I saw them coming [sound] driving down the way there.

Marcello: Well, was it after that that you went inside the building?

Gross: I don't remember.

Marcello: You mentioned that sometime during this attack you ended up in the ladies' restroom under one of the basins or sinks there.

Gross: Yes. There was no congestion in there (chuckle). I wasn't too proud about where I was going. There was no ladies around in any case.

But we went on over to headquarters at this point in time.

Marcello: You never did answer my question. How long did it seem to you that this attack actually took place?

Gross: Well, I really don't know. I know that it seemed like a long time, but as far as putting any specific parameters on it is concerned, I don't know what they would be. You sure are glad when something like that is over.

They let up enough for us to run over to headquarters. The attack was still going on. They just

diverted their attention somewhere else. As I was going over there, I remember seeing this one guy whom I had known for a long time who was a professional wrestler standing out in the middle of the parade ground holding a .30 caliber machine gun in his arms firing at these aircraft. He lived through the attack, and I think he got credit for knocking one down. I was amazed at this guy. He was always somewhat of a character around the base. Everybody knew him, a great, big fellow. I think in those days he weighed maybe 225, 230. But that was one of the most amazing things I ever saw. It sticks in my mind.

Well, when we got over to the office anyway, most of the other people were there. Our captain was there. We had a captain there then instead of the major we had before. Our chief clerk was there. Bill Goodwin was there. Most of the senior people were there. So we were issued the old World War I-type helmets, a .45 caliber pistol, and a gas mask. At this point in time I had a big red spot on my shirt from where the shrapnel had entered down through my pocket. It didn't soak through my pocket, but I had this bloody left shoulder.

Marcello: Now had you been hit by this shrapnel when you had been caught outside?

Gross: I believe so, as near as I recall. But I wasn't hurt in any way. It had gone completely through, and there was no big problem. Our captain's name was Miles, Charles H. Miles, and he was a West Pointer. When the attack started, he got his wife and his two young daughters in a corner, in an inside corner of the living room, turned the davenport up on end, you see, and got them underneath it and told them to stay there until everything cleared off. Then he made a beeline for the office.

It was decided by somebody that we should get some of the women and children off the base. Our chief clerk was a man by the name of Rutherford. He was the master sergeant at that time. He retired in 1958 as a full colonel. He had a Buick that he had just bought from a naval officer. He had a wife and three children who lived on the base. There was also Goodwin's wife.

So Goodwin took Rutherford's Buick and me and went down and picked up these families, and the first car we came to, I got out and got in it. We just commandeered

it, in other words. We picked up a couple of other women, the names I don't remember. A couple of them I didn't even know. We just saw one . . . I know we saw one woman running down the street just hysterical. One of the women in the car with us said she knew her, so we picked her up. We went downtown into the foothills up behind Honolulu where these friends of the Goodwins lived. He was a civilian at that time, and his name was Howard Martin. They had a small one-room house up here, and we barged in on them with I guess eight or ten people. They had no children, just the two of them. So everything was fine with them, of course.

As soon as we had done this, we came on back out to the base. By this time, it was pretty well all over. I think the attack ended at 9:45, and I'm sure we got back after that time. There was nothing going on as we were coming back at any rate.

So when we got back then, the captain told me, "You go to the hospital because there's a reaction to things like that that only doctors can describe, and I'm not going to have you running around like this." So I went over there, and they put me in bed for the afternoon. I think I got a package of cigarettes

and a Baby Ruth candy bar out of it. Later that afternoon, he came around and asked how I was doing. I said, "Fine." He took a look at my shoulder, put a new bandage on it, and said, "Okay, come in in a couple of days and get the bandage changed." That was the extent of it.

Marcello: When you were driving through Honolulu to take these wives to this civilian's house on the hills in the outskirts, did you notice any particular damage itself down in the city?

Gross: No, I don't think Honolulu was damaged that much.

Marcello: Well, I gather the only damage that was done there usually came from falling flak from antiaircraft fire and things of this nature.

Gross: Yes, we saw that. And there was much confusion.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what seemed to be the general state of the civilian population.

Gross: I know that there were . . . I recall that there were police officers on all the major intersections. As soon as they could identify us as being in uniform, they held up everything and waved us through just like we had sirens going. We went with no delays whatever. So there was no problem in the streets--no

chuckholes or no bomb damage or anything of this nature. I don't recall any specific damage in town from bombing. I know there was some flak but nothing serious.

So we spent that first night in the headquarters building. Of course, really, the first few days following the attack were worse than December 7, because of uncertainties and all the rumors we were hearing.

Marcello: What were some of the rumors that you were hearing?

Gross: Oh, paratroopers had landed, there were transports on the windward side of the island unloading, and everything you could think of. We felt the island was going to be in Jap hands in a matter of hours.

Marcello: Now at this stage, was any fear expressed about the possibility of fifth columnist activity on the island?

Gross: A great deal, oh, yes! I suppose it was a typical case of American over-reaction.

Marcello: What specific examples did you see of this?

Gross: Well, I can't say that I saw any specific examples. I wasn't off the base again for several days. If there were . . . whatever contacts there were with Japanese natives, it was something only we saw in the papers or heard on the radio or this type thing. It was all secondhand. I saw nothing.

Marcello: When you got back to Hickam Field and . . . by this time things had perhaps calmed down just a little bit as far as you were concerned. At least you weren't under any attack. What did the field look like? Describe the damage that was done there.

Gross: Well, there were still fires along the hangar line and aircraft were still burning and then the Hawaiian Air Depot area. I recall no fires as far as the barracks area was concerned or the married quarters area. There was damage. There had been a lot of strafing, particularly in the barracks area, and this large barracks, you know, which was pretty much the center of Hickam, had many machine gun holes through it and some shrapnel and the whole bit. Of course, there were no windows in that building, you know. It was all screened in. But I guess there had been some bombs there, too.

It was really more impressive at night. That night there were a lot of fires along the Pearl Harbor area, you see, I don't know how long it took to get them all out. We got more of an eerie feeling from the reflections of these flames that you get off the clouds sometimes, this type of thing.

Marcello: Were there a lot of trigger-happy soldiers and Marines around that night?

Gross: Boy, I'll say there were! I guess we lost about as many aircraft to our own men that night as we had during the day, among those who did get in the air.

Marcello: I understand some of Halsey's carrier planes were shot down, too, were they not, coming in?

Gross: I don't recall. I don't know that they were Halsey's carrier aircraft, but I know that there were Navy planes lost. There were some Army planes lost, too, I think. There was supposed to be a safe avenue to come in, but they didn't get around to telling all those gunners about it, I guess.

Marcello: What seemed to be the general attitude of the men after the attack? Was it one of anger as much as anything? Frustration? How would you describe the general attitude of the men?

Gross: Well, I can only go on my own thinking, that it was more bewilderment than anything. How could this happen? Now this brings me back to what I said a moment ago. I didn't want to lose this train of thought. You hear so much about Pearl Harbor being

the epitome of unpreparedness. I don't think that's the case. I think we had enough over there that we could have defended against this carrier force and knocked them off and suffered very little damage. So I got quite a kick out of seeing the motto of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association when I first came in, which is "Remember Pearl Harbor--Keep America Alert." There's a lot of difference between being alert and being prepared. We were simply not alert. This was the problem. We were prepared. I'm convinced that the type of aircraft they brought over were not their very best, and those fighter pilots that we did manage to get in the air had a field day. I'm convinced there would have been no problem whatever.

It's hard to blame some lieutenant who was on special duty at eight o'clock in the morning, you know, when he gets a call from a guy fiddling around with the radar unit, and most of us couldn't even spell radar at that time. We didn't have any idea what we were supposed to do or anything else. He knew a flight of B-17's was coming in. Well, if the reading was ninety degrees off, who set that much faith in radar at that time? You really can't fault the guy.

Marcello: I was going to ask you about that radar, and I assume that you are rather ignorant of the whole thing.

Gross: Well, we knew about it. After it was all over, we knew what had happened, you know. Joe Lockart, who supposedly identified the group coming in, was a pretty good friend of some of the guys in our office. They had come over on the same boat together. But radar was one of those newfangled things that nobody knew anything about. I don't know whether I would have put any faith in it or not.

So you see, I have felt very strongly about this through the years, and I hope that this point is brought out with some others who are perhaps in a better position to know than I am. It was not a matter of being unprepared so much as it was not being on the alert, even questioning the word "alert" with the antiaircraft units on our base, for example, and the number of maneuvers that had been called and the state of alert that had been around for several weeks.

Marcello: Who would you blame for the fact that there was no real state of alert on December 7?

Gross: Well . . .

Marcello: Again, I'm asking a private first class now, I think. Was that your rank at the time?

Gross: That's right. I might also mention that I was a specialist first class along with that because that was a pretty rare combination at that point.

Marcello: I beg your pardon (chuckle).

Gross: (chuckle) As long as we recognize that point. I guess I have learned more about this whole thing from reading about it and seeing movies and so forth.

Marcello: But I don't want to hear what you read or heard about. I want to know what your opinion was at the time.

Gross: I think at the time I thought we had just been clobbered. I don't think I was . . .

Marcello: In other words, you weren't really looking for any scapegoats?

Gross: No. We just had the living hell beat out of us, and a scapegoat wasn't really any satisfaction at that point in time. Now we didn't think it was over. We kept hearing these rumors and so forth and had good reason to believe that it wasn't over, you see, so that was a lot more important a thing to be concerned with than who might be at fault.

Marcello: I assume that after the attack then, immediately martial law was put into effect, and there were curfews and blackouts and this sort of thing.

Gross: Yes. Of course, we didn't go back to the office for a few days (chuckle). We were out filling sandbags and this type of thing, and we were, as I recall, working with the ordnance people. I don't know how long it was. It was less than a week, but I know that four or five days later we did go back, and we got around to putting out payrolls again, and, of course, we had new men coming over all the time. Life had to go on, so each had to play his own role. We wound up working a lot harder than we ever had before, I mean on a seven day basis. When you were working under blackout conditions and there was no air conditioning at that time, that could get pretty uncomfortable at times.

Marcello: Incidentally, how much longer did you have to serve at the time of the attack? You must have been fairly close to getting out if you went in in 1939.

Gross: I was originally due to leave at the end of two years, which would have been March, 1942. A few weeks before that though, I extended my tour, and I had extended it until August of 1942 because Bill Goodwin and I decided we would go back together, and we would apply for the same station and go back together, you

see. So as it turned out, I think I left the islands on September 2 or 3, so I was actually held up about two weeks as a result of the attack. I came back in September to go to Officer Candidate School.