

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION  
NUMBER  
582

Interview with  
WALLACE H. GAGE  
October 23, 1982

Place of Interview: Arlington, Texas  
Interviewer: Dr. Marcello  
Terms of Use: OPEN  
Approved: W. H. Gage  
(Signature)  
Date: 10/23/82

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Oral History Collection

Wallace Gage

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Arlington, Texas

Date: October 23, 1982

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Wallace Gage for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on October 23, 1982, in Arlington, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Gage in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was stationed at Hickam Field during the Japanese attack there and at Pearl Harbor and the other military installations on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Gage, 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. Gage: I was born in Hoosick Falls, New York, on October 19, 1915, and I was the son of Samuel Gage and Dolores, my mother, who just recently died at ninety-two. I went to school in Hoosick Falls and Williamstown and Western University, the University of the South, and I finished up there in 1939.

I went looking for a job in New York City, and jobs were

rather scarce even in those days, lapsing over from the depths of the Depression. For instance, in New York City, I noticed that the telephone company was accepting applications for jobs, so I went down there and applied, filled out an application. As I was leaving the office, I asked the girl whether she had many other applications, and she kind of grinned and pointed around the room. They had cabinets all around the room filled up with applications (chuckle), so I said, "I think the chances of getting a job in New York City are not too good."

So that's one of the reasons that I decided a little later to join up with some of the boys from my hometown of Williamstown, Massachusetts, at that time. My father had died, and my mother had remarried when I was age twelve. We went to Williamstown, Massachusetts, just a few miles from Hoosick Falls. So I had a college education and decided to go into the Air Corps along with some of the other boys,

Marcello: So you did just go directly into the Air Corps when you joined the service.

Gage: Yes, sir, I was regular Army with a degree (chuckle).

Marcello: So essentially, then, economic reasons played perhaps the most important part in your decision to join.

Gage: Yes, at that time you could "buy out" within a year, and I had in the back of my mind that, you know, if something came up I could "buy out" and get into something else. At first, the idea was to go into something that I really liked, which was

the...anything about an airplane I was crazy about it, you know. So I really hadn't thought it through too well, and you don't know all the answers, anyhow, ever, whenever you try something.

At this time, I believe you signed up for three years, and I knew I would go to Hawaii, which, of course, I wanted to see; and I'd be doing something, and I could make my plans after that.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned that you could "buy out." What do you mean by that?

Gage: At that time, after you had served, I believe, two years, you could pay the Army a small fee and terminate your services at that point. You were allowed to. However, it wasn't long after I was in the service that (chuckle) they discontinued that affair, and we got really locked in. Later, I tried to go back to OCS when I was in the weather station, and...you would have had to get back to California, to Cal Tech, to take the course in weather. I was qualified for that, and then I found out we were frozen out there--sort of unofficially frozen, you know--but as a practical matter, they were taking all their candidates from the States.

Marcello: You mentioned also awhile ago that you knew at the time you enlisted that you would be going to Hawaii.

Gage: Yes, they used that, of course, as an inducement to enlist.

Marcello: And I assume, therefore, that you took no boot camp or basic

training at New York. I don't recall the station down there. We weren't long there, Incidentally, I enlisted in Springfield, Massachusetts, and went through Devons and then down to New York, and then we were shipped through the Panama Canal to Hawaii on the old Chateau-Thierry, a single-screw vessel of notoriety (chuckle),

Marcello: That ship must have made quite a few trips between New York and Hawaii because I've talked to a lot of other people that seemed to have gotten over there on that vessel.

Gage: I learned from Colonel Miles that he had been on it, too. It really struck a spark with him (chuckle).

Marcello: Why did you want to go to Hawaii?

Gage: Why does anybody want to go to Hawaii (chuckle)? It's a beautiful place, and, well, if you're going to go into the service, what would be better? At that time, of course, that was probably the nicest assignment you could get, as far as geography is concerned.

Marcello: Now when you went to Hawaii, were you sent immediately to Hickam Field?

Gage: Yes,

Marcello: Incidentally, when did you enter the service?

Gage: Oh, the end of 1939. Gee, I forget the exact date. Anyhow, from fall, 1939, late fall, until 1945 was my...I was out by September, I guess it was, of 1945; and I put in five years and eight months total service without...well, I didn't get

back from the islands at any time during that five years plus.

**Marcello:** So you remarried in the Hawaiian Islands the entire time you were in the service?

**Gage:** No, the colonel and I...see, I transferred from the weather station. See, we had a boot camp, and then you could select to try to get into some particular squadron or specialty, and I took the exams for the weather station, got in, and stayed there, I guess, a year. Then I found out that we were sort of locked in there as far as advancement was concerned. All the good ratings had already been attended to, so I asked for a transfer to the Finance Department.

That was accepted, and we went in there with...I guess he was a colonel...well, he was a captain then--Captain Lenow. Then Colonel Miles took his place. Colonel Miles and I were transferred about a year after the blitz to the 25th Division at Schofield Barracks. The Hawaiian Division was being split up into the 24th and 25th. We were assigned there.

**Marcello:** So then you ultimately went to Guadalcanal with Colonel Miles?

**Gage:** I did that. We spent a long time there and in Noumea, Caledonia and back up into Luzon. All told, it was along, long trail.

**Marcello:** Awhile ago you mentioned a Captain Lenow.

**Gage:** I'm not sure of his rank at the time. He, of course, like most of these boys ended up a colonel. He was a fine gentleman.

**Marcello:** So you mentioned that you went from New York, through the

Panama Canal, to Hawaii, aboard the Chateau-Thierry. When you got to Hickam Field, you entered weather school.

**Gage:** Yes. We took a little course, and then we had exams, and I did very well on the exams.

**Marcello:** But you mentioned that you had trouble really making any rank in this field.

**Gage:** Well, that was just a coincidence. By the time I got on with the outfit, all the good ratings were filled out, and I got a little bit miffed because I couldn't get back to Cal Tech. I guess that was probably the main reason that I got out. I thought this was a dead end. Actually, the weather station, like everything else all over, exploded in rank. This bunch out there in the islands of course, was...a lot of regular Army and were the only ones with real experience. They had a tremendous opportunity to get into new outfits as they formed and form a basis for training others. Naturally, their ranks went along with that process.

**Marcello:** You brought up this subject, and let me just pursue it a little bit farther. Is it not true that rank did move very, very slowly in that pre-Pearl Harbor Army in general?

**Gage:** Oh, Lord, yes. The poor West Point fellow would come out there with all that fine training and stay a second lieutenant for the maximum period, and then he might get first lieutenant. Getting to be captain was a big deal. But during the war, some of these guys signed on a...at Schofield Barracks, for an example,



I thought this was some deal. Usually, a corporal or buck sergeant happened to see a notice on the board up there that anybody that wished to apply for warrant officer should sign this list. See, everybody else ignored it because they thought it was just nothing, you know. Well, he happened to be the only one that signed it, and, doggone it, if they didn't give him a warrant from either corporal or sergeant, direct, see. Other people had been knocking themselves out for years trying to get such an appointment. But this was just a fluke. But this happened, of course, after Pearl Harbor, and things really broke wide-open.

**Marcello:** Even in the enlisted ranks, promotions were very, very slow, were they not, in that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

**Gage:** Oh, yes. Some poor ol' boy who had been in there twenty years might have got up to sergeant, a tech sergeant or something; and then, of course, they went to Honolulu, got drunk, got busted to private (chuckle).

**Marcello:** Where were your quarters located there on Hickam? I assume that you were staying on base.

**Gage:** At the time of the blitz, you mean?

**Marcello:** Well, when you first were assigned to...let's just take it back to when you were assigned to Hickam Field,

**Gage:** When I first came in there, we were put in regular field tents,

**Marcello:** Hickam was in the process of being built, I guess,

**Gage:** Oh, yes. It hadn't reached its expansion point by any means. They were still working away on the hangars and permanent buildings and officers' quarters and high sergeants' quarters. I think the first three grades had quarters at that time.

So our boot training was right there out of these tents, and I guess we had six weeks of pretty good training. We checked out on a pistol. I didn't see a rifle until after the blitz. I think about a week before we went from Schofield out to Guadalcanal, we were checked out on the rifle range.

**Marcello:** Did you ultimately, then, move into the new consolidated barracks when it was completed?

**Gage:** Yes, I failed to mention that I did transfer from the weather station to the 30th--I believe it was--Bombardment Squadron for a very short period of time before I went to the Finance Office. They were fixing to train a weather detachment to go with each large bomber squadron, and that was my idea originally--to get on with them--but then I went to the Finance Office,

**Marcello:** So you did live in the consolidated barracks, then, for some time after you got there to Hickam. Describe what those barracks were like in the inside, that is, in your own particular quarters,

**Gage:** Well, they were very nice, modern, concrete buildings. As far as soldiers were concerned in those days, we regarded them as rather plush. They had real nice quarters, really. Some

of the master sergeants and others had private rooms in there. It was really (chuckle) very nice.

They had a consolidated mess right in the middle of this complex that was much higher, as far as ceilings was concerned, and it was very good. The food was excellent. They had a modern facility. They spent a lot of money at Hickam, and I guess it was well-spent.

**Marcello:** In general, as you look back upon life in that pre-Pearl Harbor Air Corps, how would you describe the morale of the people with whom you were associated?

**Gage:** Excellent.

**Marcello:** How do you account for that?

**Gage:** Oh, it was esprit de corps. People were doing technical jobs that they liked, I think, more than you would get in the regular Army, you know, the doughboys. There perhaps was a little more future to some of these jobs. They had a lot of good schools for the bomber crews and the pilots. The pilots,,back in the States, of course, for them. But they would train in many, many specialties, like they do now, but even more. I think that's one reason,,there was some,,I believe there was more advancement in the Air Corps than there was in the other branches at that time, even before the war-- somewhat. Nothing like it was later,

**Marcello:** Also, I think we have to keep in mind that everybody who was in the Air Corps at that time was there because they wanted

to be there. You were all volunteers.

**Gage:** Exactly. Everybody was interested in aircraft, I imagine, or some parts of the system. I know I was. I fly to this day, but I learned to fly after the war. I would have gone in as a cadet at the drop of a hat, but I knew I couldn't qualify because I had left frontal fracture from an automobile accident, and I had a red-green problem. I always thought anybody that got to fly an airplane and got paid for it (chuckle), that's the most fortunate individual in the world (chuckle)!

**Marcello:** Now you mentioned that you transferred to the Finance Office. Why did you decide to transfer to that particular office?

**Gage:** Well, there were openings, and I knew I could qualify, and I thought that that might have some future to it, as far as ratings are concerned. Then, also, I guess it entered the back of my mind that as a civilian counterpart it would be good, too. As it turned out, I wished to the Lord I'd stayed in the weather and gone into the civil service because I've always had a fascination with meteorology.

**Marcello:** I gather that that was a...well, I'll let you describe the men with whom you were working in that Finance Office. That was a highly qualified group of men, was it not?

**Gage:** Yes, they were. I was a college graduate, and most all of the others had had high school and in some cases...I had a buddy by the name of Gair, and to this day I cannot tell whether he made it through the blitz or not. Now he stayed

in weather, I believe, until the Japanese attack. There were three killed out of about seventeen in that outfit, and a couple were wounded. Things were so darned hectic after that I lost track of some of them. Several of them went back. Like Wingrove went to OCS and had a fantastic career flying planes and helicopters, and Bunch and Gair and Holt--a whole group of them--went back to OCS, and I just completely lost track. I don't know whether they made it through and are still alive or what. I've never been able to find out.

Marcello: What was your particular function in the Finance Office?  
What were you doing?

Gage: Oh, we did various things concerned with accounting, but mostly, as time went on, you learned to work payrolls. It got more and more involved as you went along. You just learned it by osmosis, really. In my case...I don't know. I just went in there, and they said, "Do this," and, "This is how you do it." We didn't even have a course in it. Later, I taught it when I went with Colonel Miles, you know, on to Guadalcanal. At that stage, I had to set up class, and then, of course, as time went on, they trained them in the States. I thought one of the screwiest things that ever happened was that they sent six people out as replacements--as privates (chuckle). They all had gone to OCS and qualified to be second lieutenants, but they had too many of them. So (chuckle)

they said, "Well, we can't give you a commission, so you'll have to go over as a regular replacement in a pool of privates." They were more than slightly miffed. This was, of course, about 1944 that that happened. But I thought that that was kind of curious.

**Marcello:** Now as part of the Finance Office, how closely were you integrated with the activities of the rest of the base? In other words, did you guys have to participate in any of the alerts or maneuvers or anything of that nature?

**Gage:** We, of course, were under general jurisdiction, but we were allowed a little more leeway than the average man that might have been in a squadron or on various military duties involving... I noticed that Gross said we were noncombatants. Well, I don't think that's a very accurate term because, by gosh, when I ended up in the 24th and so on, we were genuine soldiers first and payroll clerks second. I was a master sergeant in the 25th later, and we had occasion to get out there in the jungle and stand guard and so on. We didn't, of course, go up on the front line. We were what you'd call rear echelon, you know, later. But it still was every man, you know, looking out for each other.

**Marcello:** But at the same time, when you were back at Hickam Field, you didn't necessarily take part in the field maneuvers and things of that nature.

**Gage:** No. We had some pistol training, is what it was, in the Air

Force in those days, a .45-caliber hand cannon.

Marcello: Describe how the liberty routine worked for you there at Hickam Field after you moved into the Finance Office.

Gage: Well, they were fairly liberal on letting you go to town for an evening on Saturday, let's say, but overnight passes were rather scarce. Well, there wasn't much opportunity, as a matter of fact.

Marcello: Why was that?

Gage: Mainly because your civilian contacts were so limited. There was, of course, a tremendous value placed on women with all the military in Oahu. The average soldier just...you know, he'd maybe get off on Friday evening and go in, have a few brews, and look over the women and so on.

Marcello: I guess one of the reasons that they restricted overnight liberty was because, given the low pay that enlisted personnel were receiving, they didn't want them to blow their pay and then have to spend the night on a park bench or sleeping on a lawn or the beach or something like that, I imagine.

Gage: I'm a "conservative conservative," and I'm sure I wasn't typical; but when I went in, after my good college education, I got the munificent sum of \$21 a month. The second month that I was there, I sent a war bond home for \$19.25 that would be worth \$25. That is not typical (chuckle). But I had no particular gambling vices, and I didn't drink a lot, so I had no expenses.

Marcello: When you went on liberty, what did you normally do?

Gage: Well, I used to go with Wingrove quite a bit, and we naturally drank some, and we'd end up down there around the cathouses or maybe out to Waikiki. But it was a rather depressing situation from a soldier's standpoint out there. As I mentioned, the scarcity of women of any kind in proportion to the service people was out of whack. You got pretty depressed on that score.

Marcello: Prior to the war, did those cathouses down on Hotel Street do a pretty brisk business?

Gage: Oh, very fine business, yes! One of the girls in one of them turned up to be a very good friend of one of the boys in our outfit. They'd gone to school together, and she turned up there on Hotel Street. I think that was the name of it.

Marcello: There was Hotel Street and Canal Street.

Gage: Oh, I forget the name of the particular one, but it was probably the most well-known at the time. I thought that was a curiosity, that a girl from his hometown should show up there. They were good friends to start with.

Marcello: Normally, while we're on this subject of the liberty routine, would there be a lot of drinking and carousing on the weekends?

Gage: You mean downtown?

Marcello: Yes.

Gage: Well, considering all the military there,,,you realize there was Pearl Harbor, the Marines, the Air Corps, and Navy; and



they'd all be in town at the same time. It was a typical port town for us, that is, the part of it that they would frequent. It was not segregated, but it was unofficially the part that interested the military most. They weren't unduly raucous, I didn't think. You'd see some drunks,

**Marcello:** Are you saying, in effect, then, that basically the military was more or less a mirror of civilian life at that time? In other words, you found perhaps the same percentage of rowdy people there that you might find in civilian life in places?

**Gage:** I wouldn't think it'd be a bit different from Norfolk, a big naval town, you know. Around naval bases, airfields, and the like, you're going to have this sort of a setup.

**Marcello:** What activities were there on the base itself there at Hickam if you didn't want to go to town or if you couldn't afford to go to town,

**Gage:** They had movies, very reasonable, and you could get strip of tickets, and, gosh, I believe it amounted to fifteen cents for a good movie then, first run. They had good PX's that you could buy watches or eat at, supplemental eating, for reasonable prices. On occasion, they brought in special... something like the U.S.O., only not formal at that time, I don't believe. All in all, it wasn't all that bad from the standpoint of recreation. In the peacetime service, they had more time than they had after that. As you know, as soon as

the blitz occurred, it got to be a continuous thing, a seven-day-week thing. Sunday was just like every other day,

Marcello: Do you remember a place at Hickam Field called the "Snake Ranch?"

Gage: I imagine you're referring to a beer joint, aren't you? Yes, I think I attended there (chuckle) a few times.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that weekend of December 7, 1941. Let me go into that period by asking you this question. As one got closer and closer to December 7, 1941, could you detect any changes in your routine there in the Finance Office, or any other place on the base, for that matter?

Gage: Well, I might have been a little more aware...no, I don't think so. Actually, you know, we were on alert the day before the seventh. It was only taken off at around the middle of the afternoon. Then they were allowed to go ashore. I think something similar happened with the Navy. The reason, I found out later, that that occurred was that they lost track of the Japanese fleet out there, and apparently they had some coordination between the services, and they thought it was important that they be on alert. Why in the hell they didn't stay on it, I'll never know! They sure didn't find that fleet.

Marcello: How did that alert on Saturday, December 6, affect you, if at all?

Gage: Well, for one thing, we couldn't go off the base. But then

they took it off, and the word got around the grapevine... it was a most efficient communication system in the world. In no time at all, you can get the word (chuckle).

**Marcello:** So basically, then, really, up until December 7, other than that very temporary alert on the sixth, your routine didn't change any there in the Finance Office.

**Gage:** Not appreciably. We were just aware that something was going on, and the higher-ups certainly had some warning.

**Marcello:** How closely were you keeping abreast of current events and world affairs during that period before the attack actually came?

**Gage:** Oh, shoot, we had newspapers just like anybody else, and anybody that had brain one knew that the Germans were developing the blitzkrieg. Incidentally, while I'm at it, I'll make this statement, because I've always felt very bad about it. I think that Short and Kimmel got exactly what they deserved. Damn it, they had,,well, they were found guilty of dereliction of duty, and I think that's exactly what it was. They had all the opportunity, training, and everything else, probably West Point and Annapolis, to back them up. They completely overlooked the realistic things that were going on in Europe and didn't have the bases, really, prepared. By that, I mean, it wasn't a lack of equipment; it just was that they didn't put two-and-two together and make a contingent plan for a surprise attack.

Marcello: Are you saying, in effect, that you were perhaps prepared but not alert on that weekend?

Gage: Well, let me put it to you this way. On the island, there were plenty of antiaircraft guns, rifles, machine guns; but there wasn't the first sign of prepared sandbagged antiaircraft positions--not the first sign. There wasn't a slit trench; there wasn't anything realistic to ward off an aircraft. Now a week later, the place was an armed fort, and there was slit trenches underneath the barracks, antiaircraft weapons all over the place, camouflage,,in fact, I think forty-eight hours later, they could have given them a damned fit,

But,,I don't know,,for instance, where were our rifles? Where was our equipment? It was in our headquarters, locked in a locker. We were required to a gas mask to Honolulu with us. Let's see,,and otherwise, we had a "guntan" cap for your outfit. No rifle! No weapon of any kind! I guess they were afraid we'd shoot ourselves in the toe or something,

But in any event, it irked me that when this thing occurred that I had nothing within a quarter- or half-mile to fire at them. Shoot, planes had been brought down by rifle fire. Even these jets today sometimes can be brought down,

Marcello: So are you saying, then, that during this period prior to the actual attack, you had not been issued a rifle? How

about a pistol?

**Gage:** We had pistols at that time. Now it wasn't twenty-four hours--I don't believe it was more than eight, as a matter of fact--and they went up to the crater and got all this equipment from World War I, no less, and issued us a complete doughboy's outfit, including the Springfield '03, a tin hat from World War I--the flat-type--and I had yellow shoes that must have been in World War I (chuckle). They fitted fine. They felt good! We had puttees, which we never wore in the Air Force. But, man, inside of twenty-four hours we looked like an Army instead of,,,you know,,,(chuckle). But it was something, that they got caught that short with all that equipment. Maybe it was good in the long run because it made everybody mad. We said, "You bastards are going to pay for this day," and they did,

**Marcello:** Okay, let's get back and talk some more, then, about that Saturday of December 6, 1941. You mentioned that the alert was called off somewhere around noon. What did you do the rest of the day--you personally?

**Gage:** Well, I think maybe it'd be better to take it a little chronologically from the time that I knew about this thing, which, of course, as you know, was five minutes before eight o'clock. I was sleeping in the,,,

**Marcello:** Well, let's even back up...I don't want to December 7 yet. Let's talk about that Saturday of December 6. What did you

do that day?

Gage: Oh, just routine things. As a matter of fact, I elected not to go into Honolulu, but a lot of them did.

Marcello: How come you decided not to go to Honolulu that night?

Gage: Well, I don't know. There wasn't a whole lot to do in there. It was pretty late in the day, too, as I recall, and I wasn't a "night owl." I usually would go in in the daytime and, you know, have a few brews and do my thing and get back within a reasonable hour. Night transportation wasn't the greatest, as I recall, too, when you got into the wee hours.

Marcello: So what did you do that evening then?

Gage: Well, I just stayed around there. I don't recall that I did anything special except maybe read some books. I don't think I even went to a show. Just a routine deal.

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

Gage: Oh, moderate, I'd say about half of them went to Honolulu, and half stayed.

Marcello: Did anything out of the ordinary happen at all that night, so far as you were concerned?

Gage: Not a thing. I can tell you one thing that might be of interest, though, I took one of my few vacation days about a week before this. I got a trip over to Hilo. We had a little airline with DC-3's that ran between the islands. So I got some leave, and we went over to Hilo for three or

four days. We were treated very nicely by a doctor there that invited us into his home for a day or two.

One of the curious things that always struck me, though, was that while I was down on the main street of Hilo, I went into a Japanese store. The reason I went in there is that I happened to notice a "Betty" bomber--it's a two-engine bomber--pictured on a magazine of theirs, printed in Japanese. I went in to take a look at that because actually it was real neat. It was as good as our B-25's and B-26's later, as far as design, even then. This is before the war. I was intrigued with the design, and I wanted to look at it a minute. So I picked it up, and, man, that Japanese proprietor there looked as nervous as a cat. I've often wondered...he just didn't seem to want me to mess with that book at all or ask any questions about it. I've often thought that he might have been one of the few over there that had an inkling of what was coming. It was also strange that he had a magazine in Japanese that described that particular bomber.

Marcello: During that period before the attack actually occurred, when you and your buddies sat around and had a bull session, did the subject of a Japanese attack on the islands ever come up? Did you ever talk about it?

Gage: No, I don't think so. Now I might have talked about it more, myself, because I was always airplane-oriented, and I had read

about this guy that had practiced an attack there. I think it was eight or ten years before, and he pointed out to them that they were vulnerable, and they had better get ready for that sort of thing. But nobody paid him any attention.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that Sunday morning of December 7, 1941, and now I'll let you pick up the story as events unfolded on that particular morning.

Gage: Well, I was sleeping very nicely at five minutes until eight, I had no intention of going to the main barracks to get chow,

Marcello: You could sack in, if you wanted to, on Sundays.

Gage: On Sundays, yes. On Sundays that was the delicious day that you could sleep extra. Well, to tell you the truth, they weren't too rough on our particular outfit on--what do you call it--reville. But later it was--out in the Pacific. But, anyhow, on this particular day I was sleeping,

There was an explosion, and it woke everybody up, Directly after the explosion, here comes a low-flying airplane that just went right over our barracks. We had an ol' boy-- I can't remember his name--but he had apparently gotten up a little earlier, and he was sweeping or was doing something with a broom. He started yelling, "The Japs are coming! The Japs are coming!" You know, he was running around there with a broom. I recall that (chuckle)--a crazy setup.

But I went to the door, and I looked, and I saw another Jap plane come over low. Man, I spotted that red sun insignia,



and it didn't take me two seconds to say, "I'm going to get the hell out of here," because I knew I didn't have anything to fight back with; and being in a wood barracks is about the same thing as standing out in the open field, as far as any kind of bomb is concerned.

**Marcello:** You mentioned that you saw this Japanese plane. Can you describe the activities of this plane in terms of how high it was, how it came in, what it was doing--things of that nature?

**Gage:** Well, it was going like a bat. I don't think this particular one was a...well, one was a pursuit plane, and one was a torpedo plane that had dropped his torpedo over Pearl Harbor, apparently, and then didn't even bother to get any altitude. I'd say he was not more than 150 feet at the most, and probably lower than that. He started strafing directly after this. He may have been strafing--probably was--at Pearl before he got to us. You see, there was nothing but a little old chain fence between Pearl and us, and for all practical concerns we were the same thing, except that there was two hundred yards farther away from the water; and then at the end, of course, where the Hawaiian Air Depot was, there was a narrow channel there where all the subs and the battlewagons and everything came up.

But I had no problem of identification. Of course, I knew their planes pretty well even then.

Marcello: Okay, so what do you do at that point, then, when you discover that these are Japanese planes?

Gage: Well, my idea was to get out of there, and since I didn't have anything but skivvies on, I threw on a "suntan" uniform, and...I don't think I even bothered to get my hat...a pair of shoes...I didn't bother to put the socks on. My idea was to get out of there. At first, I didn't know where I wanted to go, but I knew I didn't want to stay in those blooming barracks. But you'd be amazed how many people were so unrealistic that they stood around like a...you know, you couldn't believe it. They'd sit out in the open! Well, I knew they were going to strafe those darn barracks, or bomb them--none. As it turned out...see, this line that I was on, this barracks, was wood and was right at the end of a series of them. They hadn't finished all of the construction, and these were temporary, of course.

So when I got out of there, I looked around, I said, "Great day, I don't want to be anywhere near these things." So I hide myself toward the entrance, which was...oh, I might have gone a hundred...no, fifty, seventy-five yards away from this barracks. There was another building over there that had some concrete foundations and walls, and then it was metal up at the top. That brings another story to mind, but...anyhow, I thought that would afford some protection.

Then I happened to glance off to one side, and there was some lumber piled there. It was quite a bit of lumber piled this way, and then there was another one...for some reason, they put lumber cross-ways and leaned it against this higher pile; and there was a little hole underneath, and it formed a natural protection. About that time, oh, there was hell breaking loose. There were bombs going and strafing, and the noise was just like a three-ring circus or worse.

A plane came down the field and made an abrupt turn and started back, and I said, "Uh-oh, this guy's on a strafing run," I dove under this lumber pile, and I got under there just about the time that he started to strafe. Some of the rounds went right over the lumber pile and may have hit it, and then he shot down a lot of these people standing out in the open, see. They just stood there like a bunch of nincompoops. They couldn't believe it. A lot of them thought it was the Navy or...they just couldn't adjust.

**Marcello:** What happened at that point, then? So you're in this lumber pile,

**Gage:** Well, it just happened that I could look out the far end toward Pearl Harbor and see pretty well. I'm not sure...let's see...this thing came in a series of waves. They did this bombing down there at Pearl, and torpedoing and dive-bombing, combined, and then they strafed around there quite a bit with various and sundry planes; and then a little later, there

was a flight of horizontal bombers at maybe ten, fifteen thousand feet that dropped regular bombs at various targets. I don't think they did too well on that, either. They missed a lot of things. As a matter of fact, the dive-bombers didn't do too well. They put four bombs at the headquarters, and two were long and two were short. Then later they fixed up the headquarters to protect the telephone facilities and spent a million dollars on that, I guess, and never did get to use it. But they didn't hit them in the first place (chuckle).

Marcello: So you're viewing all this from that lumber pile?

Gage: Yes, Oh, well, the main thing that happened, that I saw, that was of interest...oh, there was two things. About fifty yards, I'd say, from where this lumber pile was, and across the main street that comes in the field, there was a big wooden gymnasium that had been used that morning for Catholic mass. There was one fellow in there after the mass working on the ceremonial stuff. A dive-bomber with apparently about a 500-pound bomb blew that thing all to hell. One minute it was a building, and the next minute it was flying, flaming lumber from the building, and some of it came down on the lumber pile that I was under! So I had the dilemma of figuring out whether to stay there and burn or get out and get shot. I decided I'd stay under there awhile (chuckle), and fortunately it didn't catch the lumber pile on fire,

Then while I was laying there, they were dive-bombing down at Pearl Harbor, and that son-of-a-gun got lucky and apparently put one down the smokestack,

Marcello: Of the Arizona?

Gage: Yes,

Marcello: Did you see this?

Gage: I saw it,

Marcello: Describe what you saw there.

Gage: Well, you know what the atomic explosion looks like? This is a smaller once, but when that thing blew up, it was a horrendous metallic sound, and the whole ground...you know, Oahu is nothing but rock, really, lava rock, The whole ground jumped, I'd say, damn near a foot. That was some explosion, You know, a magazine on a battlegroup has got a lot of powder down in there, shells and whatnot. It apparently blew up mostly in one blast. How anybody ever lived through that thing, I'll never know, but a lot of them did,

But, anyhow, I'm watching this thing, you see, and this damn jolt to the ground liked to knocked me out. I was kind of stunned. It's like getting hit by a concussion or something. Anyhow, as far away as that thing was, the flames and the smoke and the whole thing was just like a typical nuclear explosion. It went up to three thousand feet in just a few seconds, and it was a big ball of flame right in

the center of it, and then, of course, it slowed down and mushroomed out. That was the sight that you saw.

**Marcello:** And about how far away were you from the Arizona, would you estimate?

**Gage:** That's hard. At the time, it seemed like we were next door, but I went back out there a few years ago, and it had to be...oh, gosh, I'd say three thousand yards, anyhow. Probably more. I don't know. It's hard to figure.

**Marcello:** At this stage, while all of this activity is taking place, what kind of thoughts or feelings did you have? Can you remember?

**Gage:** Yes, I can remember. My first impression...I said, "Oh, my God, they really got us with our pants down!" I said, "There's nothing! We've got nothing to fight back with!" We were just... you know, it was just a question of survival, as far as I was concerned. What do I do? Throw my shoes at them? I didn't have a rifle. If I'd had a rifle, I'd have loved to have laid them...and I might have got a shot in--because they were low enough.

**Marcello:** So do you have a feeling or frustration at this point?

**Gage:** Oh, Lord, yes. I should say so. Man, I was mad. I think I was madder at the people that had our rifles and ammunition locked up than I was at the Japs at the time. You talk about frustration--yes. You know, if you got to fight, you like to fight with something that will do some damage, and not just

look at them,

Marcello: You mentioned that these Japanese planes were coming in low, I know some people have told me that they were able to actually see and distinguish the pilots,

Gage: No question! No question! Like I said, 150 feet. Now I know distances on aircraft because I fly, but, if anything, it was lower than that. They were, you know, "balling-the-jack" down low, and, of course, they figured that somebody might have a rifle, so they were moving,

Marcello: But you actually could distinguish and see the pilots in these planes?

Gage: I didn't see them, but I know plenty of people that did. In fact, there is a story that goes that one guy was chased across the parade grounds by one Jap, and the guy was grinning all over himself as he was firing at him. I don't doubt that a darn bit, because they were all over the place like a swarm of mosquitos,

Marcello: Okay, so you mentioned that you witnessed the Arizona blowing up, Pick up the story from that point,

Gage: Well, there was a lull after that. You see, the initial attack, I believe, was maybe fifteen minutes, and there was like a three-ring circus going on between torpedoes, strafing with Zeros, dive-bombing. I think they went after the Hawaiian Air Depot and the hangars with dive-bombers, and then they, of course, came over with horizontal bombers,

Well, after that last wave of horizontal, there was a lull.

Well, I got out of there, and I got to talking with some other guys nearby, and the next thing we know, here comes a whole deluge again. Well, I didn't even have time to get under the pile, so I got in this building that I was telling you about that had a concrete base. It was a funny thing. Why they built it that way, I'll never know, but it was like a five, six-foot thick concrete wall. But then the whole top of it was metal--just sheet metal.

Well, I got inside this thing and got my back up against concrete wall. About that time, they started laying down a whole series of horizontal bombs, and they were right on the target on that particular instance. They lined up the hangars, and, man, the one string of bombs was headed right down the line, and this building was in line with them! So they kept getting closer--Ka-sham! KA-WHAM--and we thought, "Jeez, the next one's going to be right here!" All I could think of was Walt Disney's characters going into the air, you know. I thought, "I wonder what it's going to be like?" Fortunately, the string ran out before it got to us. But I watched this building, and it's incredible what that thing did. The walls did like the hula--the concrete walls! The metal up above was going like, you know, in the wind. But the concrete walls were doing the hula,



and it pushed me away about a foot. Did you ever see concrete...you can't believe it! When it gets an explosion like that, it does everything but stay still. I knew it was porous, and I knew it was hard, but I never knew it could do all of those gyrations and still stay intact. And it did. It did the darnedest bunch of moving around. It wasn't just that my head that was moving; it was the concrete, no question about it. I've seen pictures later of what happens to walls that shimmy.

**Marcello:** So, anyhow, you decided that you needed to get out of that building...or what happened at that point?

**Gage:** Well, after about fifty minutes, I guess it was, or an hour, in that vicinity, the show apparently had gotten over. I think there was three main waves to the whole thing. Our particular attraction at Hickam Field was limited to that, anyhow. It kind of died down at the end of the hour. There was miscellaneous fighting going on, and, of course, everything was burning. The ground was filled with debris; the field was a mess. We decided, somebody got the word, that we better get over to headquarters and get organized.

**Marcello:** Now you never had reported to the Finance Office, is that correct?

**Gage:** Not at that point. But, see, I was goodly ways. I couldn't have gotten over there...you know...but, anyhow, it was about the better part of an hour before I actually got over there,

That turned out to be the right thing. We were immediately issued instructions and rifles and ammunition then, damn it, when there was nothing to shoot at (chuckle).

Marcello: And where did you go?

Gage: After that? Well, I think we stayed there, more or less as a defensive situation, and I'm a little vague as to exactly what happened the rest of that day as to specifics; but in general, what they did was...no, the civilians were real good. They came flogging in from Honolulu. I think it was the Red Cross and some other volunteers. They immediately brought in food and people to try to help the wounded, you know. I guess they probably had...well, I'm speculating now. You want to know what I saw. But I did see that; I saw some Red Cross people there.

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

Gage: Oh, that was a rare thing indeed. We were at the headquarters-- slept right there for some reason. We didn't even go to a...well, we have any tents, and our barracks and everything were all shot to hell. Oh, I did examine my locker. I had time to do that, I guess, later, and damned if they hadn't shot a hole right through my wall locker. Incidentally, they had .30-caliber steel-jacketed bullets and then two 20-millimeters on those Zeros. One of those .30's apparently had come through the wall, went through my locker, and put a hole right

through my main suit and all my shirts, went through the floor, into the room below, and then through the wall of the barracks, and then I found the round outside. It was all splattered by then, but it was steel-jacketed. Some of those just took a big hunk out of the curb. They would penetrate. What else would you want to know?

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

Gage: Oh, well, that was almost hilarious. You talk about a bunch of people that were nervous on the trigger! It sounded half the night like there was a battle going on because everybody was firing at something--a cloud or an airplane that was either Navy or Air Corps. I guess they managed to shoot a couple down. They were real jittery. They used up a lot of ammunition stupidly.

Marcello: What did you do that night?

Gage: Well, we were just right there at the headquarters. Some guys came in low and buzzed the place. Why, I'll never know, because you...well, maybe he figured it was safer to be low than to be up a little ways, I don't know (chuckle). But everybody dove under the tables and expected another Jap attack, but it never came.

We just stayed there, and about two o'clock in the morning, things settled down a little bit, got quiet, and some guy says, "Halt! Halt! Halt!" POW! Damn, he hit a dog,

and the dog went ay-ay-yyy (chuckle). I remember that, and all the sound effects (chuckle).

Marcello: What did you talk about that night, that is, you and your buddies?

Gage: Well, (chuckle) it didn't take a good deal of imagination to know what had happened and how badly we'd been caught short. I don't recall much of the conversation. I know everybody was just a little bit nervous.

Marcello: What rumors did you hear?

Gage: Well, you heard quite a few. One of them was that some Jap had been down to the gate and tried to warn them that this attack was coming, and they just thought he was hallucinating.

Marcello: Were you fully expecting an invasion?

Gage: Realistically, I didn't, but some people did. I said, "That's a long way to haul an invasion force on the 'Q.T'" I figured they'd just had their carriers and support craft there for a blitz, but I didn't really think that they were going to land troops. In fact, we had a pretty good outfit up there--the ol' Hawaiian Division. They were real soldiers. They would have given them a fight.

Marcello: You used a term just a moment ago that perhaps a person reading this won't understand. What does the term "Q.T." mean? That's a World War II term if there ever was one. What does that mean--on the "Q.T."?

Gage: It simply means surrepticiously, you know, sneaky-type (chuckle).

Marcello: Incidentally, that morning some B-17's were coming in from the States and arrived over Hickam and in the area about the time the attack was going on. Did you witness any of that activity?

Gage: Oh, Lord, yes! I'd forgotten about the fact that I did. Yes, I saw part of that...quite a bit of it, as a matter of fact. One poor guy came in about, maybe five hundred feet and came down over the runway. I don't know what his reason was--now this is while the attack was going on--and the poor guy made the mistake of making a left turn out. See, the pattern at Hickam is a right-hand one. Normally, most fields have a left-hand pattern. But Ford Island over in Pearl Harbor had a left-hand, and we had a right-hand into the prevailing trade winds. But this guy apparently didn't know it, so he makes a vertical turn. Well, I'll tell you one reason he didn't land. He probably had a Jap back of him for part of the deal. I didn't notice him particularly. But he made the only vertical turn I've ever seen a B-17 make; I mean, he stood it up on...he put his left wing down, and he went over Pearl Harbor. Well, Pearl Harbor opened up at him like he was a drone or something. I don't know what they thought. They couldn't tell a B-17 or...it's a wonder he didn't get shot down right then because they did have a few things firing by that time over there. I'll have to give the Marines credit, and I think the Navy had some antiaircraft--

not a whole lot--but they did throw up a little fire. I don't think we had anything on Hickam Field except machine guns operating for quite a while. But, anyhow, he got out of there, and...I don't know. I guess he might have made it in later,

Some of them got all the way down to the runway and got shot up just as they were landing. A few of them, I heard, and know of from reading and otherwise, got to other outlying fields. See, they'd come all the way from, I think San Francisco, and they were low on gas. Incidentally, I don't believe they were armed.

Marcello: They weren't, I guess they probably took the armament off to give them less weight put on more fuel to get over there.

Gage: Right. At that time, 2,400 miles was stretching it.

Marcello: Did you have much of an appetite or a thirst that day?

Gage: As I recall it, I had a pretty dry mouth (chuckle). I don't recall whether I drank much or not.

Marcello: That's kind of normal, is it not, in combat situations?

Gage: I would think so. I would think that's a normal reaction to fear, anger, frustration,

Marcello: What did you do in the days immediately following the attack?

Gage: Well, they got more done in the next two or three days than they'd got done, I think, in the three years before. They started digging and putting sandbags up, and, man, that place was bristling with armaments in another forty-eight hours.

Marcello: You haven't mentioned anything about the Finance Office. Did you not report back over there at all during this period?

Gage: Well, that's where we went. When I said headquarters, I meant our...well, it turns out, you see...now the administrative headquarters also had the Finance Department in it. I didn't explain that to you.

Marcello: Had any damage been done to the Finance Department during the raid?

Gage: Just the exterior of the building was pock-marked from these bombs that were too long or too short, but they did throw a lot of shrapnel into the building.

Marcello: So far as you know, no records or anything like that were destroyed?

Gage: Oh, no, there was no material damage to the inside at all. As a matter of fact, the building was built very well.

Marcello: So was your personal routine and the routine of the other members of the Finance Office during those days following the attack?

Gage: Well the main thing that transpired...of course, our barracks were gone, and a lot of our equipment. We could salvage... we immediately were reassigned to pyramidal tents, as I recall, for a while, and we set them up in a different location. Then a little later, we were put into some of the vacated quarters, actual quarters, to disperse them more than anything else, to get under cover. Then, of course, as soon as feasible,

we turned to our normal activities of working the payrolls and so on.

Marcello: As I mentioned to Bill Goodwin, who preceded you in an interview, it's amazing, but very logical, that even in a situation like this, the work of the Finance Office must go on. Not everybody could be digging trenches, building gun emplacements, and things of that nature.

Gage: Well, there were temporary assignments. You got to remember that contrary to Carl Gross, a noncombatant, so-called, in the Army Air Corps is still a soldier. When he's needed, he's on tap. Later, of course, the colonel and I were actual doughboys down in Guadalcanal and Luzon, and many a time I've been out in the jungle on guard duty, if nothing else. Out there, for instance, you had your own protective...you were a unit unto itself, and you protected your own unit because everybody was crawling around in the darn jungle behind or in front, and it didn't make any difference...what were we getting at?

Marcello: We were talking about your routine in the days following the attack,

Gage: Well, we got back into the groove, as far as our work was concerned, right soon because, well, what else was there to do? I think some of them were put on temporary duty with various assignments. Oh, of course, right after the blitz, there was a lot of things...I did a variety of little clean-up



jobs here and there, but I can't even recall what they were. We didn't get to set up gun emplacements or that sort of thing. In that sense, we were noncombatants.

**Marcello:** When did you have your first opportunity to actually view the extent of the damage that was done on the flight line itself?

**Gage:** Well, all you had to do was turn your eyeballs because, you see, we were practically on the line there.

**Marcello:** What did you see?

**Gage:** Well, the thing that impressed me more than anything else was that there seemed to be about six inches of debris all over the field. Everything that had blown up dropped down, of course, and they were pulverized, and there was dust and rock and burning autos. Some poor guys had climbed under automobiles to protect them, which didn't protect them. The automobile was burned, and they got shot where they were.

**Marcello:** Were the damaged and destroyed planes and so on still on the flight line when you had a chance to see it?

**Gage:** Well, all the hangars were burning, and a lot of aircraft. You see, one of the things that was distressing was that they had all these planes lined up like ducks in a row, and when they strafed, why, they set one or two up on fire everytime, and it was a cinch from their standpoint to create the maximum damage. They weren't scattered out into revetments like they were later. The Hawaiian Air Depot made quite a

show, too. As I recall...I didn't know it at the time, but I wondered how in the world they did so much damage to that thing. Well, what happened was, apparently the Jap pilot that was dive-bombing it got hit with machine gun fire, and his whole plane and bombs and the whole works went in there. Of course, that did the maximum damage to a tremendous, big, old arena-type building there. It was like a giant-sized hangar.

Marcello: Were most of the planes and so on simply smoldering hulks by the time you got a chance to observe them?

Gage: There was very few of them that were flyable after that. As I recall, there was a half-dozen A-20's, I believe they were, sort light bomber-pursuit combination...not pursuit but just a fast light bomber. They were on line and didn't get hit too much. I know they used two or three of them that night to try to...I don't know. I guess they were going out on reconnaissance. That's where things went haywire. Some of these idiots would start firing at their own planes as they were taking off or circling around there. That was bad.

Marcello: What kind of feelings or emotions did you have when you saw the damage that had been done on the flight line?

Gage: Whew! Well, you saw a lot of people around--dead, of course--and they hadn't cleaned that thing up too much when I came by. My reaction was anger. As I say, in my particular case, I was really miffed that we didn't have our equipment set up, see.

We had equipment, but it wasn't set up! I think that evening they sent down antiaircraft guns from Shafter and Schofield Barracks and other places. Why in the heck didn't they have them before? That's what I want to know. As far as I know, they didn't have a real antiaircraft gun set up on the field. They had machine guns only. Now I could be wrong about that.

**Marcello:** You mentioned that your normal sidearm was the pistol. Did you always have a pistol, or did it have to be issued to you everytime that you'd use it? How did that work?

**Gage:** Well, for a long time we wore a sidearm around there, and then they decided they'd keep them over at headquarters, and we didn't keep them in the barracks. I think somebody shot themselves in the foot, and that set an example of what not to do, and some bird-brained brass decided that maybe these soldiers wouldn't be allowed to have their weapons, which doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

**Marcello:** When did you finally leave the Hawaiian Islands?

**Gage:** (Chuckle) Let me see. Well, what happened there, I was not in the Finance Department very long from the time I left the weather station and the 30th Bombardment Squadron. I got into Finance, and I guess it was about a year from the time I got in there...Colonel Miles and I were tapped to go to Schofield Barracks to join the 25th Division and set that up for at least...amplify it. So then we became...I was regular

Army, but I was a regular Army soldier then. I mean, that's a good outfit--the 25th Division,

We toured the Pacific from then on. We went to Guadalcanal at the end of 1942 by way of Noumea, and then we were there a year and then Auckland, New Zealand, and Noumea and then back up into the Philippines. We got into all those affairs.

**Marcello:** Well, that's probably a good place to end this interview because that's a different story altogether.

**Gage:** Yes, it is.

**Marcello:** I want to thank you very much for having participated. You've said a lot of interesting things, and I'm sure that students and scholars will find your comments most valuable, Mr. Gage.

**Gage:** I wouldn't be surprised if a couple of them get a laugh (chuckle).