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Interview with  
DAVID BEDELL  
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Oral History Collection

David Bedell

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello                      Date of Interview: April 25, 1986  
Place of Interview: Austin, Texas

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing David Bedell for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on April 25, 1986, in Austin, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Bedell in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was stationed at Hickam Field during the Japanese attack there and at the other military installations in the Hawaiian Islands on December 7, 1941. Mr. Bedell was a member of the 443rd Signal Battalion.

Mr. Bedell, 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.

Mr. Bedell: I was born in 1922 in a little town called Duquesne. That's one of the suburbs of Pittsburgh. I attended elementary school and high school, and I graduated from Duquesne High School in 1940. It was June of 1940, to be exact. I entered the armed services in July of 1940.

Dr. Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the service in 1940?

Bedell: Well, both of my parents had been deceased. It wasn't a case where I was knocked about from pillar to post, but there didn't seem to be any other alternative for me. The steel works were there, but...it was just a spur-of-the-moment thing that I decided it'd be nice to join the military.

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

Bedell: Well, actually, to begin with, I didn't select the Air Corps. I selected the Navy. I opted for the Navy, and, in fact, I was all prepared to leave home with the blessings of the Navy and the blessings of my relatives. But at the last split second, I was recalled to the naval recruiting office, and they ran a recheck on me. One of the questions was, "Have you ever been operated on?" I informed the recruiter that when I was a child--small child--I'd had a mastoid operation. Well, this sort of took him back a little bit, and they went through a few more questions, and they finally decided that (chuckle) I wouldn't be suited for the Navy. He did mention that if I was ever in a position where I was in close proximity to heavy naval gunfire or cannon that my ears just wouldn't stand up to the test, as it were.

So I excused myself and walked out of his office and walked across to the old Federal Building in Pittsburgh, and the Army seemed to be waiting there with open arms for me. That's how it happened. Of course, at that time, when you

did join the service voluntarily, you had an option of several places you could go. You could serve in Panama; you could serve in Hawaii; you could serve in the Philippines. As an eighteen-year-old, I thought Hawaii would be a nice place for a boy just out of high school. So I just opted for Hawaii, and that's the way it started.

On July 26, I was inducted into the service and sent to Fort Slocum, New York--that's up at New Rochelle--and from there, in a short time, I was transferred to Fort Dix. In September of 1940, why, we made our way from New York, down through the Panama Canal, up to San Francisco, California, to Angel Island, where Fort McDowell was. From Fort McDowell, after a few weeks there, we got on another ship, and we sailed for Hawaii. We got over to Hawaii around, oh, late in November of 1940.

Marcello: So you were there approximately a year or a little bit more than a year before the attack took place?

Bedell: Right, yes.

Marcello: When you joined the Army, did you join the Army, or did you join the Army Air Corps at that time?

Bedell: No, I joined the Army. I joined the Army. In fact, as far as the Air Corps connected with my being in the service, this 443rd Signal Battalion that I was a member of, were what you'd call an "attachment"--same as the quartermaster and the ordnance and the medical people. All were attached to

the 7th Air Force. In other words, later on, when the 7th Air Force began their move, we just packed up and traveled right along with them. I wouldn't say that I'm an Air Corps member; I'm an Army man.

Marcello: I wanted to get that clear for the record. Am I to gather that you really had very little basic training during this period from the time you joined until you got over to the Hawaiian Islands?

Bedell: Very little. I hear so many people that were in the service talk about basic training, and that's one of the things that myself and all the people that were around with me at that time...it just wasn't to be. There was no basic training. The time we spent there--at Fort Slocum, Fort Dix, and Fort McDowell--was just more or less of a waiting period to find out the time, the place, and when they were going to ship us to Hawaii. Even after we got to Hawaii, that was all forgotten, other than learning how to drill, learning your left from your right. But there was no rifle ranges, no obstacle course, no what you would call a set six months or whatever of basic training. There was no period that I was a recruit and graduated out of basic training then went into the Army. I was in the Army from July 26. The basic training was just a...I don't know why, but that never happened to me--basic training.

Marcello: During this period, from the time you enlisted until you

get to the Hawaiian Islands, did you take any series of tests or anything like that to determine what your special aptitudes might be?

Bedell: No, I didn't. We didn't do anything like that until we were finally at our destination at Hickam Field. Once we were there and situated, then there were various phases like the Signal Corps, heavy construction, or communications. I just happened to fall into that category of men that were placed in a heavy construction battalion. That's the way it all started out.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you got into the 443rd Signal Battalion. How did it all come about?

Bedell: When I first went over, there was a signal company that they brought from the ship at the dock and over to Hickam Field. Before that only to someone, I was to become a member of the 307th Signal Company. Now this was, like I say, in late fall of 1940. Then it changed to the 53rd Signal Company. Then the final change occurred when they decided they were going to make a battalion with three companies, and they formed this battalion, the 443rd Signal Battalion. I was in A Company of the 443rd Signal Battalion.

Barcello: Describe how you got into the heavy construction work.

Bedell: Well, the 443rd Signal was a heavy construction battalion. In comparison with any occupation you might do as a civilian, it more or less compared with Bell Telephone. It was a

battalion that installed cable, poles, and anything that a telephone company would do to establish communications between two certain points. In other words, I may as well have been working for Bell Telephone, but I was under the Army. We had all the basic equipment that the civilian utility companies use--the line trucks, tractors, and all the heavy equipment. Like I say, it was basically for the installation of establishing communications between two points.

Marcello: I would assume that by the time you arrived at Hickam Field, they were beginning that phase of the big build-up and so on and so forth. Was this, in fact, taking place when you got there?

Bedell: Well, if it did, I didn't notice it (chuckle). To be very honest with you, like I say, I'm eighteen years old, and I'm in Hawaii, and I thought, "Hey, it doesn't get any better than this," the way the commercial on television says. It was just like putting in a day's work, and then you had "X" amount of hours off duty, and you could do just about anything you wanted. Everything was ideal--the weather and so forth. What money we were paid then--which was very little, as everybody knows, at that time--we stretched our money. I never went for want of anything while being in the service. I never stopped for a minute to say, "Gee, I'm broke." I was never broke. I always had enough to



take care of me, and, like I say, it was a lark from the time we got to Hawaii up until that Sunday.

Marcello: Well, let's talk a little bit more about that period. How slow or rapid was rank in your particular phase during that period before Pearl Harbor?

Bedell: Rank was very fast. Now this 443rd Signal Battalion was newly formed, so the complement of NCO's compared to the enlisted men was high. They had to have "X" amount of master sergeants, tech sergeants, buck sergeants, corporals, PFC's. From the November of 1940, the time I got to the island, until November of 1941, one year, I was a buck sergeant. This may not have happened probably if I would've been in an infantry company, in an artillery company, or something of that sort. But in this newly formed battalion, their allotment of NCO's even then seemed too much; I mean, to each company there were so many NCO's. There were more NCO's, let's put it this way, than you had people running around with no stripes at all. Everybody at least had one stripe--corporals, sergeants, staffs, techs, bucks, or master sergeants, all the way up the line. The rank, as far as I was concerned, went up very fast. You know, people in the infantry spent five to ten years in the infantry, and if they'd make corporal, hey, that was a great thing. If the orders say you have to have this many people wearing stripes, that's the way it is. I was very fortunate in

that category. I moved up quite fast for the short period of time.

Marcello: Am I to assume that the training that you received there within that unit was essentially on-the-job training?

Bedell: More or less, yes. When we did get to Hickam, they had several schools. They had schools on telephone communications; they had schools on radio; they had different things. The people in the 443rd Signal Battalion mostly attended what amounted to a telephone communications school. It was working with telephones and switchboards and learning cable splicing and things like that that you would ordinarily do if you were working for a public utility. I don't know what, but at times they did pass over people for promotions. There were people in our own company or in the battalion that had been in the service longer than I had and that were not promoted.

I've always been able to get along with people, and I just feel very fortunate that I was able to do what I did and get where I got to. It might not seem like a real goal for some people, but considering the thinking at that time, the way things were in 1940 and 1941, I thought, "Hey, this is great." I had no indication, of course that in another year down the line we were going to be in a full-blown war. At that time I spent my time living as nice as I could, and the Army provided me with everything. I felt, like I say,

"It can't get any better than this."

Marcello: What kind of a workday did you put in during that year you were there before the attack actually occurred?

Bedell: Well, they put so many hours in. They would take in a classroom for the telephone school. You did so much classroom work and then so many hours out in the field doing all sorts of things--learning cable splicing, learning how to install poles, learning how to string open telephone wire. The day was divided up. The morning probably was devoted to the classrooms, and in the afternoon they would go out into the field. Our final goal, the main goal for the whole battalion, was to establish telephone communications between Hickam Field and Wheeler Field.

Marcello: Hickam Field was the bomber base, and Wheeler Field was the fighter base.

Bedell: Right. Once we got organized so that everybody seemed to know their job and how we were going to do this, it was a daily routine to string wire from Hickam Field to Wheeler Field. This went on day in and day out and day in and day out. Each day, when it was all said and done, when the wire was in, it never worked. It never worked. It finally worked after they found out where all the flaws were. We had to run back and open wire that had been somehow pulled apart or destroyed. It got so that in your sleep you could do this, but, like I say, it never worked. It never worked until

December 7. That day it worked. Now whether that's a coincidence...but that day it worked.

Marcello: What time would you usually knock off at the end of the day?

Bedell: Oh, probably at 4:00 or 4:30.

Marcello: And what would be your routine then at that point?

Bedell: Well, we'd come in and go to the barracks. Of course, if your're out in the field, well, naturally, you've got to be a little tacky, so everybody took a shower, changed and sat around until it was time for chow. Of course, at that time, Wednesday afternoon was a holiday. Wednesday afternoon and Saturdays and Sundays were the three free days that you had.

Life on the post was great, I thought. You could do any amount of things in your spare time. You could go to the gymnasium; you could go to the movies; you could go fishing; you could go up to the Snake Ranch and have a few beers. It just worked this way day in and day out. Of course, on the weekends and on Wednesday afternoon, if you had your time in and didn't have any duty, why, you were free to go into town or go off the base. You could go anywhere once you left the base on Saturdays and Sundays.

Of course, on Saturday mornings there was still enough of the Old Army left, though, that Saturday morning was an inspection morning. Although we did have some officers that left a lot to be desired, we still had some from the old

school that came up through the ranks, and they went "by the book." As far as the military end of it, you might've horsed around during the week fooling around with the telephone school or with the job of installing this wire and cable, but come Saturday morning, that inspection was right up to snuff. If you didn't heel to exactly what they wanted, you got the old gig, and you didn't go anywhere.

But the military part of it, I enjoyed. I didn't particularly enjoy going to telephone school, and I didn't enjoy going out in the field monkeying around with all the cable and stuff. But the military end of it--I don't know--for some reason I enjoyed it. I enjoyed anything connected with the military that I was part of. I really enjoyed it. I can't say whether that makes me a true patriot or not, but that phase of my life in the Army really appealed to me--the military end of it. I'd have given anything to be able to wind up at a place like West Point, which was out of the question, anyway. I still do today. I enjoy anything military. I enjoy the parades and any kind of military activity. I think it's great.

Marcello: You mentioned that one of the things you could do when you were off duty was go fishing. I think we have to remember that Hickam Field was right next door to Pearl Harbor, was it not, the naval base?

Bedell: In proximity to Pearl Harbor, the only thing that separated

the two was a cyclone fence. At the far end of the Hickam Field, the length of Hickam Field, was where the channel came into Pearl Harbor, and you could go up there anytime in your free time. There wasn't a beach there. There was a dock there at the time. You could swim off the dock, or you could fish off the dock. That's where we did some of our recreation. In all the time I was in the service, I never got to Waikiki Beach until 1976 (chuckle). I knew it was there, but the opportunity never even struck me to spend any of my time at Waikiki. Of course, at that time Waikiki was certainly a little different from what it is today. There was only two hotels, and both of them were more or less, to say the least, restricted to the ordinary serviceman.

Marcello: They were outside your price range, I guess.

Bedell: Right. They certainly were.

Marcello: We're talking about the Royal Hawaiian and the Moana.

Bedell: Right, yes. You hear soldiers say that they've seen signs where it says, "Soldiers and Dogs Keep Out." I've never seen any of them. In fact, I never ran into any resentment in Hawaii from any of the people.

Marcello: Another place you mentioned as a location of some of your recreational activities was the Snake Ranch. For the listeners of this tape and the readers of this transcript, what was the Snake Ranch?

Bedell: (Chuckle) Well, the Snake Ranch was the post beer garden. For those that liked beer, that was the place to go because it was the only place on the post. It seemed like there were a lot of guys that for every free hour they had you could find them in the Snake Ranch. Generally, in the evenings, after the evening meal, why, it was a quite popular spot on the base. It was the same routine over and over. Each night it was the same thing. The only thing you could do there was sit and drink beer and talk. That was all. There was no other means of any activity. I don't know whether they went there to forget or drown their sorrows or had a chip on their shoulder at somebody that they would consume "X" amount of beer, but that was it. That was, I'll tell you, the focal point of probably every military installation that I've ever served on.

Marcello: What would a can or a bottle of beer cost?

Bedell: It was a dime. The only beer I can recall was Primo beer, and that was locally made in Hawaii. I can recall that was ten cents. In fact, I can't recall another kind of beer. They probably had other beers there, but Primo was the main one. They had Primo beer, and they only played one song. I can recall that to this day. It was probably the most popular song in the islands, especially around the date of December 7, and that was Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys playing the "Rose of San Antone." That was number one on

the jukebox. In fact, sometimes I think that was the only one on the jukebox because it just played over and over. You can only take so much of "Rose of San Antone" and Primo beer (laughter).

Marcello: How extensive was gambling on the post during that period?

Bedell: Well, I couldn't attest to...there was gambling. Naturally, with that many men confined to an area, that was one of the vices, I guess--gambling. I can honestly say that, other than playing pinochle or something, I never became involved in crap games or poker. Of course, then there were the people that roamed around or on the post that would offer you five for ten, you know. Those guys made a living like that.

Marcello: Loan sharks.

Bedell: In fact, they were the military loan sharks. They weren't even people with rank. They could be even the common, ordinary privates. But they had the money, and they would loan it to anybody. I've seen that case many, many times on payday. In fact, on payday night there were people that didn't have one dime to rub against one another. They were living off the loan shark until the next pay. It just seemed to follow them all through their military life, always in hock to somebody. They were charging, like, 50 percent. I'll give you five, and you give me ten. I guess there was no way you could flinch on that. There was nowhere you could



go. He knew where to come on payday if you owed him so much money.

No, I never really became involved in any gambling. I had too many other things to do to pass the time and that I thought were more fruitful than gambling.

Marcello: When you went off base, where did you usually go?

Bedell: Well, as soon as we went off base, of course, you got the cab or the bus and went into town, and the first stop was the YMCA.

Marcello: That's where the cabs or the bus stopped.

Bedell: Right, that's where it stopped--right there.

Marcello: What was across the street from the YMCA?

Bedell: Right across from the YMCA was the Black Cat Cafe (laughter). You could do a lot of things. In fact, this friend of mine from Lebanon, Pennsylvania, him and I were friends when we were at Fort Slocum, and we were friends up until the very time we had the attack in the islands. Then he went one way, and I went the other. But we'd go all over that island. If we couldn't commandeer something from the company--a car or a truck or a jeep (of course, they didn't have jeeps at that time)--we would go everywhere all over the island and visit the different places. We used to go out to Bellows Field a lot because Bellows Field, in my estimation, probably had the finest beach. I know that's the finest beach on the island of Oahu. I can't say anything about any other

island. But Bellows Field beach...of course, the civilians never got there. You'd go down to Bellows Field beach, and there might be two miles of beach, and there might be only ten G.I.'s using the beach. But it was a beautiful beach.

Bellows Field was nothing more than a runway where the fighter groups from Wheeler Field would come down and stay for maybe four or five days. They used that field for gunnery practice. In fact, off and on they would send some of our people to go out to Bellows Field for no other reason than to operate the telephone switchboard. If the fighter group wasn't there, sometimes out at Bellows Field I was the only one on the base—the only G.I. on that whole installation. Of course, I can say, it wasn't a huge installation. But here I am, the only one there. I didn't have anything to do but sit outside and sun. Then we would go back to the company, and they would send somebody else out. I did some time at Bellows Field.

Marcello: I gather from what you say that, at least in your particular case, you made a lot of your own fun.

Bedell: Right. It didn't take very much to make us happy.

Marcello: Do you think this is because perhaps most of you were products of the Depression and never had too much to begin with?

Bedell: Yes, I certainly do. Who'd ever have thought, three or four years before that, that here you are, over in Hawaii,

still a kid and wet behind the ears for that matter; and here you got all this at your fingertips that you can do and nobody to answer to until Monday morning, especially if it was a weekend. This battalion, although they ran it like a military battalion, as far as when you were free and you had your own time, they were very lax. You weren't pressed or pushed or anything. You had to pull the regular duty. You had to pull kitchen police. You know, that was a "must." You pulled kitchen police and guard duty. You hear infantry people talk about guard duty, guard duty. I didn't know what guard duty was (chuckle). The only guard duty I ever pulled was aboard ship, while wherever we were going. I did a stint of guard duty.

The days just seemed to go by, and it looked like the whole world was looking through rose colored glasses at that time. That's the way it looked to me, and I thought it was great. Like I say, most of the guys in the battalion were the product of the same depression that I was, and it was the same way with them. It was just a peaceful life. You had your duty; you had to attend school; you had to work in the field. But it wasn't like a noncom screaming at you all the time, nor did your officers. Especially the officers that come up through the rank, they were the best.

The ones that they would ship over after the war, you know, the so-called "ninety-day wonders," you sort of lost a

little faith in your leaders. We had some good officers, some guys that really came up from the ranks, and they weren't what you called...the "ninety-day wonders" all attended school like the place in New Jersey where the Signal Corps operated, Fort Monmouth. They all graduated out of Monmouth. They spent ninety days in Monmouth, and they came over, and they were supposedly our new communications construction officers. Like I say, the old officers were the overseers of the battalion, and when it came time for the military end of it, they're the ones that took over. They're the ones we looked up to and the ones I respected the most, anyway.

Marcello: Within the course of a month, could you possibly have all four weekends for liberty?

Bedell: Free? Oh, sure. Like I say, every Saturday and Sunday and every Wednesday at noon, you were free.

Marcello: In other words, you could leave after that inspection on Saturday and theoretically stay in Honolulu until it was time to report on Monday morning.

Bedell: You had to fall out on Monday morning at reveille, or fall out for formation on Monday morning.

Marcello: How often would you go into Honolulu, let's say, within the course of a month?

Bedell: Oh, I would say four weekends you could go into Honolulu. If you decided to stay overnight...but a lot of times the guys would go in on Saturday around noon, they'd be back on the

post Saturday evening before sunset. They'd spend their free time Sunday not doing anything in particular.

Marcello: Well, here again, wouldn't finances have restricted the amount of time you could spend in Honolulu?

Bedell: That's true. Of course, when you're on the post, if you want to go to the movies, that came out of your pay. You didn't have to go up and pay money to go to the movie. You didn't have to pay money to get a haircut.

Marcello: You had the chit sheets.

Bedell: Right, yes. As far as your laundry, that was all taken care of. On payday you were paid at that time \$21 a month. That's exactly what you got. Like I say, then the chits came out. If you received \$21, you wound up with, say, \$16. For some reason I could do just about anything I wanted to with \$16. It's surprising what you can do with \$16. Of course, naturally, the prices then weren't high. You could get probably the finest breakfast in the island for 20¢. I'm talking about a full breakfast for 20¢. If you wanted to take in a good movie in town, and, of course, if you drank and wanted to go into soak up yourself in the Black Cat, then your money was going to go. I always had at least a couple of bucks in my wallet. I've gone from Saturday noon until Monday morning with...I left the post with a five-dollar bill in my pocket and still came back with a dollar and some change. Of course, the transportation was only a quarter, I think.

I think it was a quarter from Hickam Field into Honolulu, so that's 50¢ a round trip.

Marcello: What would you personally do when you went into Honolulu?

Bedell: Well, the first thing I'd do, we'd go and eat. We'd go to a half-decent restaurant. We would get food that you normally didn't get on the base. Then we might pick out some other place beside the Black Cat and go in and sit and have a couple of beers. Sometimes we'd get on the bus and go to the other end of the island. You just spent some time over there. Like I say, it didn't take a lot to please us.

Marcello: Did the Army personnel frequent Hotel and Canal Street, or was that the special domain of the Navy?

Bedell: Well, I guess when it comes right down to it, (chuckle) everybody knew it was there. I wouldn't know what percentage of servicemen frequented the area, but everybody knew it was there. I think that probably a lot of that is certainly true. But there are a good many cases, as I found out, that it was just by word-of-mouth that somebody learned about Hotel Street. I don't know whether it was to be "macho" to tell your buddies that you were down at Hotel Street. It was there. I guess it was probably a necessary evil. It probably was a good thing that it was there for that many servicemen converging on a town on a weekend. Like I say, a lot of it, I know personally, was just blowing steam from

some of the fellows.

Marcello: What role did sports and athletic competition play in the life of that pre-Pearl Harbor military?

Bedell: Well, of course, there was a lot of keen competition, especially when I got to Schofield. Each company or battalion or unit competed, and they vied for the championship in all sports--football, basketball, track, baseball, soccer. At Hickam, I know there was no football team. They had a basketball team, and they had a baseball team which they were pretty proud of. Later on, people like Joe DiMaggio played for Hickam Field. Prior to December 7, there was a lot of sports, and if you were good enough to compete, you went out and competed. They had a stadium there. The baseball was a primary sport at Hickam Field.

Marcello: How about the boxing smokers? Were there very many of those at Hickam?

Bedell: No, there weren't. If there were any boxers at Hickam, the only place they competed, that I know of, would be up at the bowl at Schofield. I can never recall a boxing match at Hickam. I've seen some of those so-called "professional" wrestlers come out to Hickam to put on a show similar to what the USO would do after the war started. They would come and entertain the troops, if you want to call it entertainment. No, I can't recall any boxing smokers. If you're on the base and if you have a boxer that's exceptionally

good, why, sooner or later you know who he is, and you hear about him, and you know when he's going to box. But I can never recall going to a boxing match, even up at Scofield, where there was any fighters from Hickam Field. Like I say, baseball and basketball were the two main sports. It was competitive to a degree, but they didn't take it as serious as the infantry did up at Scofield. Oh, my, that was really serious.

Marcello: I don't know if you've ever read From Here to Eternity, but what he has to say about the emphasis on boxing and sports and so on was true.

Bedell: Oh, yes, right. But I don't think that that ever occurred at Hickam. They didn't have the "jocks" at Hickam. They were at Scofield. Of course, I never put any service in at Scofield, but I understand--and I believe it--that that's exactly the way it was. The "jocks" were the little kings at Scofield barracks.

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

Bedell: Well, I thought the chow was pretty good because they had a consolidated mess where they fed the entire post. Of course, some things you like and some things you don't like, but overall I felt that the chow was better than passable. I don't think I've ever made any derogatory remarks about the chow at Hickam. If I didn't like it, I didn't eat it. I enjoyed the Army chow. I liked "SOS"; I liked Spam (laughter).



Marcello: What were your living quarters like there at Hickam?

Bedell: Well, when we first went to Hickam, we lived in what they called "Tent City." We had pyramidal tents. They were constructed well, and they had a wooden floor. Let's see ...how many men did we have? I think it was eight men in a pyramidal tent. Of course, we had footlockers at that time. Later on, when we moved over to the other barracks, they issued us wall lockers where you stored your clothes. We had footlockers and the regular Army cots. Of course, we had bed linen and sheets and pillow cases. I think it was a nice, comfortable living quarters.

Marcello: Did you eventually move over into the barracks?

Bedell: Yes. We moved over into the old two-story barracks. You've probably seen the big barracks at Hickam. Well, at that time that was like the Sheraton of the Pacific. That was a beautiful, beautiful building.

Marcello: Was that new barracks completed by the time you got there, or were they in the process of still building them?

Bedell: No, it was completed. They were living there, and they were using the consolidated mess in that building.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into those weeks immediately prior to the attack at Pearl Harbor and also at Hickam Field, of course. As one gets closer and closer to December 7, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to get worse, could you in your job detect any changes in

the routine of the base?

Bedell: To be perfectly honest with you, I could not. I didn't even hear rumors. I don't know whether I wasn't concerned, but, believe me, if there was any impending danger coming that I could be made aware of, I certainly would have listened up. Of course, the newspapers were full of the war over in Germany. I can honestly say that if there was anybody surprised that morning, it was me. Let me put it that way. If there was anybody on that island that had a rude awakening that morning, it certainly was me because I had no indication. I don't know about any of the other organizations--I can't speak for them--but for our own battalion, it was the same routine right up until December 7. Saturday night was still the same.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese during that period before Pearl Harbor, what kind of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind? Of course, there were quite a few Japanese who lived in the Hawaiian Islands.

Bedell: Right, right. As far as the Japanese living in the islands, I never came into direct contact with them, not even just to say hello to any Japanese. I figured these people lived here, and I'm not certainly going to do anything to antagonize them. Of course, on the same note, none of the Japanese ever spoke to me, either. The Japanese people were there. They were there just like the Filipino people and the

Hawaiian people (such Hawaiian people that you might find there at that time). I don't know how many pure-blooded Hawaiian people were there, but I imagine they were a minority--the pure-blooded Hawaiian people. I never gave any thought about the Japanese people from Japan. Of course, you've seen the characters in the cartoons and everything, and they're all pictured the same--all pictured the same.

Marcello: And how was that?

Bedell: (Laughter) All small of stature, all with a lot of teeth, and all with glasses that if you held them up you probably couldn't see across the room here. I never had any contact with Japanese people. The cartoons, naturally, made fun of them. I would see the cartoons, but I wouldn't give a thought one way or the other whether he was funny or whether he wasn't funny. It didn't concern me. Of course, for everybody it was always the little yellow man from across the sea or this or that. Like I say, I never made any remarks pro or con, one way or the other, about the Japanese people.

Now I talked to Filipinos over there. Of course, there seemed to be more Filipinos than Japanese. At that time I didn't really realize who was Japanese or who was Chinese or who was Korean. They did use a terrible misnomer with those people. They called them "gooks." I would never do that. In all the time I was in the service, I would never

call a native a "gook," even after we'd moved away from Hawaii to the other islands in the central Pacific. I know I wouldn't like anybody calling me a "gook," and I know they resented it. But they called them "gooks." I couldn't fathom why they'd call a man a "gook." He's either Filipino or Chinese or Hawaiian. Hey, that's the way I looked at it—they were all Hawaiians. Even though it wasn't a state, the people who lived there, regardless of what race they were, were all Hawaiian people. They lived in Hawaii, so that made them Hawaiian. But I would never call a man a "gook." The sound of the word didn't appeal to me.

Marcello: As one gets closer to December 7, did the base ever undergo any alerts or anything of that nature?

Bedell: Oh, yes, we had alerts on the base. Oh, yes. They came as a surprise, but everybody at that time was aware that, even though it was an alert, it was still a drill, and you actually realized that you weren't having any actual problem with anybody. We had alerts, but I can't recall any blackouts.

Marcello: When one of these alerts occurred, what would you personally be doing? Where would you go, or what were you supposed to do?

Bedell: Well, if I can recall, all the alerts seemed to occur at night. Even after everybody was bedded down for the night, they would use the air raid warning. At that time, they had

a huge PA system, and they would use a siren. You'd wake up, and you knew in your heart that it was an alert, that it was just a drill, a trial run. There was nobody coming to get you, and you just stayed put until the alert was over. It wasn't a matter of falling out in full battle gear or anything like that.

An air base is altogether different than an infantry base. They always look at the Air Corps as "flyboys," and they were a chronic, lackadaisical people, and the only thing they worried about was their airplanes. They weren't worried about any alerts or any drills or any blackouts or anything. They were just seen as the jaunty-type servicemen, and that's why probably there was a lot of disharmony between the people from the infantry, people from the Navy, people from the Marines. There was a certain rancor among the services, naturally.

Marcello: You mentioned this rivalry and so on among the services. Was it common from time to time for the Navy pilots over at Pearl to buzz Hickam Field or anything of that nature? Did that happen very often? Do you remember?

Bedell: I can't honestly say that I recall them ever buzzing the base. Even though Hickam Field was, what you would say today, laid back, I don't think that a Naval flyer would've got away with buzzing this installation. They flew over, naturally, all hours of the day, but I can't recall any pilot

ever going out of his way to put on a one-man show over the base.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, then, you did not notice any of these alerts occurring with more frequency.

Bedell: No, I can honestly say that I didn't. Well, let me put it this way. Up until December 6...December 6 was on a Saturday, and any arms that this 443rd Signal Battalion were issued, which in our case was all small arms, either .45-calibers or Springfield rifles or with the Thompson submachine gun... up until December 6, we had the ammunition for those guns. If somebody woke you up out of a sound sleep, in five seconds you could have the gun in your hand, and it was loaded and ready to go. On the morning of December 7, we didn't have that ammunition. Beknownst only to someone, through orders or whatever it was, all the ammunition was returned to the supply shack. All rounds were turned in, and the only thing you had was your weapon.

Marcello: Where normally would the small arms and the ammunition be kept? For instance, you mentioned a moment ago that you could have your weapons and ammunition very quickly if an alert did occur. Where did you normally keep the arms and ammunition?

Bedell: You mean, when we had the ammunition, where would it be kept?

Marcello: Yes.

Bedell: At that time we had wall lockers or your footlocker, and the weapon might be stored there. For all intents and purposes, the clip may be in, and it may be loaded. Of course, it was on safety, but it was there for you to use if you had to use it at that time.

Marcello: With all of these people of Japanese ancestry on the island, was there ever any thought given to these Japanese committing sabotage or anything of that nature? In other words, suppose war did break out between the United States and Japan. Was there ever any thought given to these Japanese perhaps committing any acts of sabotage there on the island?

Bedell: Well, there were thoughts of it for some reason or another the closer it got to December 7. Like I say, though, there was still no proof that I could personally see that something was going to come up. But the newspapers indicated stories of possible sabotage, not mentioning by who or any names or anything like that. When I speak of myself, I'm speaking of all the men belonging to my unit. We never ran across anything.

We did a lot of moving among the Japanese. I spoke before about that cable. Now that cable went through some rural areas or even small villages with strictly Japanese. Now whether at that time, they were possibly taking notes of what we were doing, I don't know, but we seemed to get along with them. Of course, they all spoke to us. Naturally,

the older Japanese couldn't speak English, and we couldn't speak Japanese. But if you saw them at a distance, they would wave. They were Japanese, and we were Americans. We were doing our job, and they were up there tending their rice paddies. So what are you going to think of that? You couldn't think, "Well, something is wrong here."

Marcello: How often would you get a chance to go over near the flight line where the bombers were? Did you go over there very much?

Bedell: Not as a rule, not unless we had a particular job to do in that area. You could walk over there on your off time. You could walk all over the base. You could walk over to the flight line, in the hangars--anywhere you wanted. But, no, as a rule, we had no business over there on the flight line. Our job wasn't the flying end of the air base, so we never went over there. We'd go over on occasions if we wanted to look at the airplanes, or if you had a friend over there, naturally, you'd go over and visit them. It wasn't off limits to us, but we had no cause to go over to the flight line for any reason other than strictly business or that way.

Marcello: How did they park those bombers over there?

Bedell: (Chuckle) I might not have been over to flight line too many times, but I certainly know how they parked them. They parked them wing-tip to wing-tip.

Marcello: What was the rationale for that? Do you know?



Bedell: I don't know. I've often thought it must be military thinking because everything in the military is in a line. I don't care whether it's airplanes, whether it's buildings, or whether it's men. Whatever part of the military--and that's all branches of the service--for some reason or other, they have to be put in a line. I don't know whether that originated back when General Custer was running the show up there at the Little Big Horn or what it was. Hey, there's a chow line; there's a pay line; there's a line to go into the movie; all the barracks are in a line; the vehicles are in a line; the airplanes are in a line; the hangars are all built in a perfect row, and so are the barracks. Everything comes down a straight line. That's the way it has to be. When you line the men up, it's a straight line.

Marcello: I've heard two other theories, also, in addition to the one you just mentioned. I've also heard it said they possibly lined them up that way because they were easier to fuel than if they were scattered all around. I've also heard that they lined them up that way because they were easier to guard in case any saboteurs did slip on the base.

Bedell: Well, that may be...

Marcello: Nevertheless, they were all in one straight line.

Bedell: ...but it sure certainly proved them wrong on the morning of December 7 (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that weekend of December 7.

Describe for me what you did that Saturday, December 6.

Bedell: If I can recall, I must have gone to town. I must have gone to town after lunch or inspection. Naturally, there was an inspection on Saturday morning. Then I had lunch. Then if everything went well, why...by this time we had been issued a Class A pass, and you could go off the base any day of the week after hours. In any of your free time, you could leave the base. So we had this permanent pass. I can't honestly say where I was that Saturday, but it only seemed natural that I would be in town or some other part of the island. I wasn't on the base. I can recall that. Late that night, I was there; but on Saturday afternoon and all through the evening, why, I know I wasn't on the base.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that Sunday morning of December 7, 1941, and what I want you to do is to go through your routine as it unfolded that day from the time you got up until all hell broke loose. Describe for me your routine that day from the very beginning.

Bedell: On Sunday morning the mess halls on military bases aren't what you would call extremely busy, especially breakfast. There are a few that get to the mess hall, and probably the ones that get to the mess hall are the young men who would also attend church services. I can recall finishing breakfast.

Marcello: So you did get up in time for breakfast.

Bedell: Oh, yes, I was at breakfast. The mess hall, in proximity to the barracks, was probably less than a hundred yards. We had walkways between the barracks. These were made out of wood. You've probably seen them. They looked like a picket fence laid down on its side.

Anyway, I had breakfast, and I'd come out. It must have been 7:45 or maybe 7:50 because, as I say, it was just a short hop from the mess hall back to the barracks. So we're walking back. I guess it's just force of habit if you're stationed on an air base, regardless of what's flying over, that you have a tendency to glance up. You hear an airplane engine, and you glance up. I did hear planes, but you could tell it was flying at a greater altitude because instead of just the ordinary low-flying airplane engine, it was a drone. I just happened to look up, and I couldn't make out whose or what kind of airplanes they were because they were so tiny because they were flying at such a high altitude. I swear that it's just like you picture from the old World War I movies, especially the ones about the Air Corps. They're flying along there, and all at once, whoever in charge--the flight leader--gives a signal, and one by one they peel off in this formation. Well, it's just the way it happened. I just stood there looking. Like I say, they were at an awfully high altitude.

I was just watching, and they're all just little black dots.

Marcello: From what direction were they coming? Northwest perhaps?

Bedell: Oh, let me see. Let me picture the island now. I would say they were coming from the southwest. I just stood there and watched as they came down. Even though Hickam is that close to Pearl Harbor, you still have a lot of obstructions in the way--fuel tanks, barracks, different kinds of administration buildings. In other words, standing on the level of Hickam, you cannot see Battleship Row. When they did come down...then at a certain altitude they'd leveled off. Then you could see that they were dropping something. I don't know how much time had elapsed from the time they seemed to go into this long glide until we had the first indication of whatever it was they were dropping was making contact with something on the ground. Even then, the only thing we could notice was the sound. Whatever they were dropping, when it did strike, it made a sound--a sort of a muffled sound. It was not a loud sound; it was sort of muffled, like, "WHUMP! WHUMP! WHUMP!" like that.

Marcello: And this was over at Pearl Harbor?

Bedell: This was at Pearl, yes. We still had no indication. Of course, when I say one or two sounds, it was a continuous sound. It just followed one sound right after the other.

There was no small arms fire. Of course, if there was, where we were we wouldn't have heard it anyway--like antiaircraft fire or machine gun fire. But this was at the very beginning. There was nothing for a short period of time that indicated that somebody was also returning fire.

For all intents and purposes, we just stood there. Nobody even said, "Hey, it's the Japanese!" or "What's going on?" Nobody knew. So we just continued back to the barracks, but we naturally continued at a little quicker pace because something wasn't right here this morning. Nobody said, "Well, the Marines are practicing over Pearl Harbor again," or "The Navy's out practicing with their planes." You often heard a lot of that, but I never heard anything like that on December 7. We got back to the barracks.

Of course, by this time the entire base is alerted. Regardless of what end of the base you were on, you knew something was amiss. Well, then the first indication that there was something really wrong was that black, acrid, yellow smoke. You see it at a distance, but you couldn't tell what it was or where it was. In the meantime of all this, here's this continuous bombardment. Then the retaliation began from the ships in the harbor with the antiaircraft fire and the small arms.

By this time, we're back at the barracks. At the barracks

they have a crawl space underneath them, maybe two feet. You could probably get down on your hunkers and go from one side of the barracks to the other. There wasn't a case of any panic or any fright. There was just a case of everybody seeming to be awe struck. Nobody even mentioned it was the Japanese, yet. For that short time, we just huddled up against the barracks. Up until this time, Hickam Field wasn't involved in the bombardment.

Then the next few minutes or half hour--fifteen minutes or whatever--just seems to have escaped me. I don't know how long it was. I couldn't tell you if it was seventeen minutes or twenty minutes. It was just time, for that matter. As far as I was concerned, it was just a period of time. Of course, as far as Hickam Field was concerned, then all hell let loose at Hickam.

Marcello: Describe what happened there.

Bedell: Oh! The most frightening thing of all wasn't the fear that any of these airplanes were after you personally. The most frightening thing of all, that I can recall, was the noise. The noise was just...I can't describe how much noise these bombs made when they made contact, especially when they started picking the hangars. The hangars, of course, were nothing but steel and glass, and they're so huge and hollow. When they were hit, you couldn't believe how much noise they actually made. Everything was rocking by this time. The

ground was, for all intents and purposes, shaking a little bit. From where we were, like I say, we couldn't tell whether they had picked out the planes lined up at the flight line or not, but we knew it was the hangars. By God, they just kept up this steady noise, and just about the time you'd think they would let up on it, here they would come again.

Marcello: What kind of planes were taking part in these raids at Hickam?

Bedell: They were bombers. Of course, they couldn't use the torpedo planes. There wouldn't be any percentage in using a torpedo plane on an air base. They were bombers and fighters. At that time, I didn't know a Mitsubishi from a Zero. I couldn't even say whether there was Zeros involved in the attack. They were probably low-level bombers. I know they were painted green, and I know they had a red insignia painted on the side. By this time--like I say, I can't give you any clear definition of time--airplanes were passing and crisscrossing Hickam Field at low altitudes. If you'd have had a ten-foot pole, you could've reached up and swatted them. It was uncommon for an airplane, you would think, to fly that low over enemy territory, but they were so low that you could figure out every detail of that airplane. They were just crisscrossing back and forth at this low level and just blowing the hell out of things, including those

beautiful barracks up there. These planes that were flying at low levels were just using their own armament other than bombs--whatever cannons or guns that they had. It was just like they were buzzing around there looking for someplace to pounce: "What can we hit next?"

While all this was going on, somebody came up with the idea, "Hey, don't you think it's about time we have some ammunition for these weapons?" Here we are, with these weapons in the barracks and nothing to put in them.

Marcello: Were you guys still huddled by the barracks watching what was going on?

Bedell: Yes, yes, huddled by the barracks and underneath the barracks. Some of the fellows hadn't even left the barracks. They were still in the barracks. Everybody more or less tried to find as much cover as he could.

Marcello: How far were you from the flight line and the hangars and that sort of thing?

Bedell: Oh, say, on a straight line, maybe 100, 125, or 150 yards at the most from the runway itself. Before the runway is, of course, the flight line and then the hangars, so you're talking a hundred yards, anyway, at the most, to the hangars.

Marcello: Did you have a clear, unobstructed view of the hangars and flightline?

Bedell: No, no. Our area was situated at a part of the field where the hangars were more or less a distance away. In other words,



I couldn't stand and look out onto the flight line, or I couldn't see any of the planes that were sitting there. If I looked at an angle, I could see the hangars because the hangars, naturally, were so big. But to look straight out onto the field itself, we didn't have that view because there were other buildings away from us.

Marcello: Awhile ago you also mentioned that the planes were flying very, very, low. Could you estimate how high they were?

Bedell: Oh, I would estimate it was under 500 feet--under 500 feet.

Marcello: Could you distinguish the pilots at all?

Bedell: Yes, you could.

Marcello: Describe their attire and so on--what they had on.

Bedell: Well, I know what Japanese pilots wear, and I know what he looks like, but I couldn't say, "Hey, look at that guy! He's wearing that quilted flying suit, and he's got that flying helmet on with that headband around his head." I couldn't see that much. You couldn't see him sitting in that cockpit and grinning at everything he looks at. But you knew the pilot was there. You could see there was a pilot there. In some cases there were two--a pilot and probably a gunner. Like I say, they were no more than 500 feet high. After the bombers had finished, they just started picking everything out at random--picking barracks out, picking...hell, they even laid a few rounds into the "Snake Ranch" and the chapel.

I'm up to the point where somebody said, "Well, how about some ammunition?" I can only recall one man that I knew of, besides myself...the other fellows...I know they were there, but I couldn't picture who was who at that time. We decided to go down...now this ammunition shack is on the edge of the runway, so we worked our way down through the company area, staying as close to the buildings as we possibly could. We came to an open stretch and we had to get from where we stopped--an open stretch--across to this ammunition shack. There was an avenue running down there. It was called Hangar Avenue. Naturally, it was named Hangar Avenue because the avenue ran past the flight line where all the hangars were. Now this space is probably--from where we were to this ammunition shack--oh, maybe 400 feet. This shack is sitting out there all by itself, and we're over here. We get across Hangar Avenue, and we get across two or three hundred more feet of open space to get to this shack.

I can remember to this day one fellow's name, Peter Jordan, who was in our outfit. He said, "Well, are we going to make a run for it, or are we going to stand here?" We think, "Well, we've got to get over there." So Pete started across first. Believe me to this day! Pete gets it right about in the middle of Hangar Avenue, and I just happened to glance up. Hangar Avenue is a long boulevard; it ran the length of the base. He gets in about the middle of that boulevard,

and I looked up Hangar Avenue, and here's this fighter coming down. He's coming right down. If they had had a yellow line in the middle of the avenue, he would have been following that. He's only about 300 feet in the air. He's just coming down, and his guns are chattering away, and he's kicking up everything that's in his path. "Oh, God," I says, "Pete's going to get it regardless! There's no way he's going to get off that street!" We kept screaming, "Pete! Pete! Look out! Look out!" By God, he made it. He made it over. I don't know whether the gunner was just firing just to hear himself make a lot of noise, but Pete made it across this avenue.

Of course, after this guy had flown past, we didn't even look to see where he might have gone to, whether he might of circled around and come back. We all started across. We got across. I'm only talking about six or seven men. I'm not talking about the whole company or battalion.

So we get over there, and we get to this ammunition shack. The supply sergeant is there--outside the shack. He's at the shack, but he's outside. Now he don't want to open up. In the first place, he don't want to open up the shack. He's got the key, and there's a padlock on the door, and he don't want to open it. Okay, so one thing led to another, and they convinced him that now was the

time to open the shack. So we get the shack open, and then he proceeds to go inside. Then he proceeds to issue us "X" amount of rounds--no more, no less. You got what the book called for. If you've been issued two clips, that's all you get--two clips. Here's a shack that's probably got enough ammunition in it to do a good job on anybody.

So then we decided to take matters in our own hands, as it were. We figured, "No way is two clips going to be enough." We didn't actually have anybody to shoot at, anyway, but it just maybe might've given us a little better feeling to know we had all the ammunition we could carry. Just in case if something went wrong personally with each of us, we'd have had enough ammunition. It felt good to have all this ammunition. So then they just started to gather up as much ammunition as we could in their pockets and were carrying as much ammunition as we could carry.

So back we go. By this time...like I say, I certainly cannot tell you how much time had elapsed.

Marcello: What sort of a weapon did you have now?

Bedell: Me personally?

Marcello: Yes.

Bedell: I had a Thompson .45-caliber submachine gun. It might not be the best weapon in the world, but I always thought that if it didn't do anything else, it sure would put the fear

of God in some people. It's probably only accurate maybe up to twenty-five yards, but when you pull that trigger and all that power comes out, you figure, "Hey, you're all right." Like I say, it wasn't an accurate weapon. That's what we got.

Anyway, we get back to the barracks, and all this time they've just made a shambles of Hickam Field. The barracks are blown to hell and gone. The flight line is gone for all intents and purposes. The planes on the ground are all gone. The barracks...everything's blown up there. There's casualties everywhere. But in our entire battalion, we didn't have one, not even a scratch. But there were casualties. People were caught out in the open. Of course, there were casualties up in the main barracks. When they blew that up, some of the people never got out. There were civilian casualties.

Marcello: So you never really did have anyplace specifically to go if something like this occurred. In other words, in the Navy everybody has a battle station.

Bedell: Right, right.

Marcello: But you really had no specific place to go.

Bedell: No, no, no. In other words, you mean like a battle station? Per se, no, we didn't. No, we never had a battle station to go to. The only thing that we knew was that someday the day would come. Like I say, I told you how we'd practice

and practice and practice the installing of this communications between Hickam Field and Wheeler Field. That was our chief intent and purpose. That's what we were going to do, and that's what we were going to do this day, regardless if the entire Japanese fleet was out there. This was our job; this is what we'd been trained for. We were going to start this.

Then we went out, and we went through this routine again. They assigned so many men to a squad, so many men to a platoon. We got to our motor pool. Of course, the officers were taking command of all this. They were the ones that were calling the shots. Even so, we knew exactly what we were going to do. They didn't have to tell us where to go. What they did was take one platoon, and they would go to a certain spot on the highway between Hickam Field and Wheeler. The next platoon would go to another spot, until you get them stretched out all the way up to Wheeler Field.

Then we did our job. We started installing communications back to the next post until everything was meshed up. This was the one time in all our efforts that it did work. But, again, for all intents and purposes, it didn't mean a thing. It was one, single telephone line from Wheeler Field to Hickam. Wheeler Field already had communications with Hickam. There was a civilian telephone setup. What we

were doing was more or less makeshift, but that's what we were trained to do, and that's what we did.

Of course, then the second attack came, and we were caught out on the highway during that time.

Marcello: In the meantime, during that first attack, did you see any resistance being put up there at Hickam Field?

Bedell: Oh, yes, because there were units from Scofield that came down to train the Air Corps people in the use of antiaircraft weapons and machine guns. They had brought their own weapons down with them. In other words, they had different places around the perimeter of the base that they had been using prior to December 7. But they never actually fired the guns because, if they would've, why, you certainly would've heard them. But we knew they were there. They were there to train the Air Corps people in the use of antiaircraft weapons. Yes, it didn't take that long for some resistance to show, especially from these old infantry hands up there. They knew what to do, and they had Air Corps people with them, and they got together. There was return fire.

Marcello: Did you see anybody shooting at the Japanese planes with small arms such as rifles and pistols and so on?

Bedell: Oh, yes, yes. Oh, well, with pistols, yes. I saw them shooting with pistols, but it was sort of ludicrous to shoot at a Japanese fighter plane with a hand pistol, which it probably wasn't accurate more than thirty, forty yards

either. But it was just a feeling that you were shooting at something.

In the second attack, we were caught out in the open on Kunea Road. That's a road that runs to Pearl City.

Marcello: Okay, so you now have your weapon, you report to a particular location, and it's here that you meet your officers and so on.

Bedell: Yes, they're with us on road. They're with us. Each platoon had its platoon officer. Well, we had one officer per platoon. These officers weren't the so-called "Ninety-day Wonders" that everybody talks about. They were officers that had been in the service for some time.

Marcello: Now where did you meet them? Where did you hook up with them?

Bedell: Oh, they went with us. In other words, a truck left with so many men; there was a truck that left with so much equipment; there was an officer with his driver and his jeep. He had so many NCO's with him, and instead of one big unit, they made up several small units, all with a commanding officer, NCO people, a messenger, truck drivers, and men to install the equipment besides all the equipment we carried with us.

Marcello: Now you definitely did detect a lull between the first wave and the second wave.

Bedell: Oh, yes, because that's when we made our move. We thought it was over. We were glad it was over. Still at this time,



we had no indication of what had taken place at Pearl Harbor, other than the smoke. Of course, when you come out of Hickam, you start up this road that passes Pearl Harbor, and you can stand and see just about everything that there is to be seen in Pearl Harbor because you are elevated a little bit.

Marcello: What could you see over there?

Bedell: Oh, my God, it was just unbelievable--the destruction! Actually, you could not only see the smoke; you could hear the fire. You know how fire will crackle, especially an oil fire. Everything, no matter where you looked, was just burning and smoking.

But in all this, even over at Hickam, we did see several Japanese planes that had probably been hit by naval anti-aircraft fire. They were shot down, but they weren't shot down in our area. I'd say the closest airplane shot down to where we were was at Fort Kamehameha, which was probably maybe a mile away.

This second time we were caught out in the open.

Marcello: Describe how this all unfolds.

Bedell: Well, it was either sugar cane or pineapples growing between Pearl City and Hickam. We weren't even aware of everything because we were going out into sort of the rural area. We were out on this road, and here's where the Japanese stragglers, I guess, figured they wanted to make a name for themselves.

I guess they thought, "Well, if there's anything left to shoot at, here's a good chance for us to take care of what's down on that highway." Any likely target that they would spot, especially in the military...I don't think they went out of their way to blow up some old farmer's shack or something. By this time the road was clogged with military personnel and trucks and vehicles and jeeps and everything. They figured, "Hey, well, this is a good time, before I get back to my carrier, maybe to empty my guns." Again, it was this low-level strafing attacks. They would come over, and the word would get down the line, "Here they come," or whatever, and everybody would bail out of whatever they were doing, either into the cane or either into a culvert or something. Then he would pass, and they would come back up and resume what they were doing. Then there'd be another one come along in a few seconds.

There was an interesting incident here. This one fellow...they'd come over, and he was in a culvert. He just stepped out from under the culvert and unholstered his .45-caliber, and he just shot seven rounds into the air. For what it meant, I guess he felt safe. Then he put the gun back in. I guess he felt pretty good: "At least I fought back."

The time seemed to have gone so fast. By this time it's maybe approaching noon. Of course, as far as the

Japanese, everything's over--they're gone. They're gone  
God know where, but they have left.

Marcello: During the attack itself, how would you describe your  
own emotions? Fear? Anger? Curiosity?

Bedell: Well, first, like I said before, there was no panic. Then,  
like I say, everybody was awe struck more or less. The  
first time I felt fear was when we started to cross Hangar  
Avenue, and I looked up and saw this plane coming down. That  
was the one time I really felt fear. Then I felt anger.  
Of course, the anger set in. Oh, boy, then the longer the  
day went on, the angrier you got. There was no way you  
could take your frustration out on anybody.

We weren't even aware, after we'd left Hickam, that  
there were as many casualties as there were at Hickam. Of  
course, we didn't realize that there were so many casualties  
at Pearl Harbor. Of course, you'd be a fool to stand there  
and look at that harbor and say, "Well, everybody's all  
right. We just lost some ships. We didn't lose any people."  
It didn't take any brilliance on your part to determine that.

Well, then the day goes along, and we're out on this  
highway installing this cable.

Marcello: You're installing this wire?

Bedell: Yes, yes. Like I say, it worked. To be honest with you,  
it was a joke. In all that training, it was a case of  
either letting these guys sit around on their butts in the

barracks or going out here and getting some exercise by stringing this wire. It didn't mean actually a thing as far as the war effort or our determining retaliation against Japan or anything like that. Like I say, communications had been established for years between these two points. But it was a case where you've got "X" amount of GI's under you, and this is what you do, regardless. After December 7, after that happened, if there had been no war, and if I had stayed in the service maybe twenty years, probably twenty years later, I would've been still doing the same thing day after day. We had to have something for them to do, so this is what they did. They're trained to do this to keep them out of harm's way. This is what we'd do everyday. But we did it that day, that Sunday, and it worked, which is not, what you'd call, "feather in our hats." It was just a coincidence that it worked after all these times.

Marcello: How long did you stay out there?

Bedell: Until late afternoon, and then we returned--straggled back into Hickam. Now everybody didn't go back together. They went back...well, whenever an officer gave you an order to go ahead take a truck back, you'd take your men back. So we came back to Hickam, and by this time we realized what had really happened here. There was an awful loss of life and a great amount of devastation. Japan did it. No one had declared war yet, but we knew we were at war. We were

at war with the Japanese Empire.

So we got back to the barracks, and then they told us to take the men, take the trucks, to a place called Red Hill. I don't know if you've ever heard of Red Hill. That was an old, extinct volcano which the Army and the Navy both used for the storage of high explosives. Everybody pictures a volcano coming up to a small cone. It looks nice on a postcard. But this was a huge volcano. I don't know how far across it was, but it was a huge valley. All around the side of the valley and into the walls of the volcano itself, there was lava. These caves had been installed by the military, and then here's where the munitions were stored. Of course, they had all the conveniences, such as running water and so on, and that's where the headquarters was for the "powers that be" at that time. They were all there. Anyway, this is where they took us that night.

We hadn't had much of anything other than water from seven o'clock that morning. Now it was after dark. Everybody's tired, and I guess that fear makes you maybe more tired or whatever it is. Your mouth's dry, and your whole system is just keyed up. You're keyed up to a point where you just can't even move anymore. You feel frustrated. There's nothing you were able to do to make any sort of retaliation at all.

They put us in this crater. They didn't put us in

these caves; they put us down in the hole of this crater. This crater's overgrown with vegetation. It's been there for years. It's overgrown with vegetation. It was also overgrown with wild pigs. There was probably more wild pigs shot that night than any night in the history of the Hawaiian Islands. To top all this, it began to rain after dark. It rained and, I mean, it was just a steady, hard rain. The only thing we had were these little two-man pup tents. You might as well be covered up with newspapers as to have one of them on you. Anyway, it rained.

Marcello: What were you supposed to be doing out there?

Bedell: No one could tell us why we were supposed to be there. They just said, "You go there, and this is where you're going to set up." Then the next day, they returned us to Hickam. I don't know why in the name of God they sent us to this crater at that night because if anything would've happened in the way of a rumored invasion, we sure wouldn't have been able to do much about it down in this crater (chuckle). But we were down there, and everybody was afraid to move. If you had to have any body functions to do, boy, you did it there. You didn't go outside because there was small arms fire all night long. Everybody just shooting at random—anything that moved. The next morning there were dead pigs all over the place because with the least little rustle somebody would fire in that direction, and there

you've got a dead pig on your hands.

Marcello: Did you fire that night?

Bedell: Yes, oh, yes. Yes, I'll admit I fired. You know, you'd be supposed to say, "Halt! Who goes there?" Well, there was no "Halt! Who goes there?" You heard a noise, and you shot. Then you listened to see if anybody was there at all. Nobody slept. Nobody slept since seven o'clock that morning. We stayed there that night, and nobody slept that night.

Marcello: You had nothing to eat since...

Bedell: Now while we were in this crater, we went up to where the headquarters were set up. They had chow there. All it was was bread and coffee. That's all we had, I can recall, that night—just bread and coffee. There was no butter, no jelly. Just bread and coffee. The coffee was black. That's all we had that night.

Marcello: You did not set up any defensive perimeter or anything of that nature?

Bedell: No, because actually we weren't in the defensive end of anything. The only thing we defended was ourselves. There was no situation where we were told, "We're going to set this gun here and that gun there." Hey, everybody was just huddled down in them pup tents with this rain coming down. There was probably more fear at that time, after this had all blown over. At night, hell, you were

afraid of getting shot. You knew it wasn't the Japanese shooting. If you were going to get shot, it was going to be by one of your own people.

Marcello: What kind of rumors did you hear while you were sitting there?

Bedell: Oh, my God, we heard rumors that Japanese paratroopers had landed in the cane fields on the north shore. In general we heard that the Japanese were making landings at certain and certain places. Of course, all the different rumors came out about how this all came about. They said that people of Japanese ancestry on the island had supposedly cut arrows in the cane fields to point towards Pearl Harbor. Hell, you didn't need an arrow to point to Pearl Harbor (laughter). Here it was. Who needs an arrow when everything's sitting there for you?

You had to use a little bit of common sense. Common sense could tell you that every person of Japanese ancestry on that island certainly wasn't your enemy. They were probably more dumbfounded and more frightened than we were. Now some of them tended to be a little cocksure of themselves.

That's how we spent December 7, and like I say, the time elapsed so fast that whatever went on in the meantime was just a part of the day. I didn't see anybody that could have possibly ever been put in for the Congressional Medal for anything he might have done. It was just self-preservation.



It was every man for himself, but they all stayed together. It wasn't the idea that anyone would say, "Well, I'm not going to do this because I don't think it's right." Right or wrong, if an officer or a noncom told them to do it, they did it.

Marcello: How would you describe the conduct of the officers throughout this day? Did they show qualities of leadership or not?

Bedell: I wouldn't say that the officers really relished what might have been going on, but they seemed to have been prepared for it to the extent that "this is what we've been waiting for a long time. Any ability we might have, this is the time we're going to bring it out." I credit the officers, especially in our battalion, with leading us down the right path that day and that night and the next morning.

Marcello: What did you do the next day?

Bedell: The next day we returned to Hickam. Of course, as I recall, the fires that had been burning at Hickam had burned themselves out. But that wasn't the case over at Pearl Harbor. I don't know how long after December 7 the fires continued to burn.

Marcello: Did you get a chance to get over and look at the flight line?

Bedell: No, I didn't. I got up close enough to where I could observe the hangars.

Marcello: What did they look like?

Bedell: Oh, they were just masses of twisted steel and broken glass

and just utter destruction. Of course, these new barracks that I told you about before, they were probably the most beautiful barracks in the United States Army at that time. But they were just leveled. They were just like a picturesque resort hotel the day before. They were all painted white and everything was spic and span. It was landscaped with tropical vegetation. Now there was just utter destruction. Of course, there was a great loss of life in the barracks. I imagine the barracks took the brunt of the casualty list at Hickam Field. The other casualties probably were people that were caught out in the open and didn't get that chance to find shelter. They were all out in the open. There were quite a few casualties right on the parade ground. Common sense would tell you that that's the last place you want to be--standing out on the parade ground.

Marcello: I do know that on the day of the attack, some B-17's were coming in from the West coast, and they tried to land. Did you observe any of that?

Bedell: No, sir, I didn't. As far as the flying end at Hickam Field, we were attached to them, and whenever they said "jump," we just jumped and trotted along behind them. When they started to make their move across the Central Pacific on the march toward Japan, why, wherever they went, one platoon would go to this island, one platoon would go to that island, and another platoon would go to another island. After that, they

just kept hopscotching across the Pacific until it all came to an end.

Marcello: What did you do in the days and weeks following the attack? What kind of work were you doing?

Bedell: Well, after a period at Hickam, they moved us out completely. They moved us lock, stock, and barrel--everything from kitchen and supply and ordnance and all our signal equipment and all our heavy construction equipment. They moved us to an area over around Fort Shafter. It didn't even have a name, but it was in a patch of woods, a wooded area. We stayed over there for quite a while.

Marcello: Were you still laying telephone wire?

Bedell: No, no, we never laid another line from Hickam to Wheeler after that. We just went about our business, and I guess nobody realized what we were supposed to do, actually. After that Sunday, it was just another case of "we got these people over here in these woods, signal battalion, so what are we going to do with thme?" Well, we just seemed to pass the time there day after day doing little odd jobs. They would run a few men back to Hickam Field to do some repair work on the communications, or they would run some men out to Wheeler Field or out to Bellows Field. But they would always return to this bivouac area. That's where we stayed for...oh, we must have been there for two months. Of course, by this time everything for all intents and

purpose had settled down. Then we moved the battalion right back to Hickam. They began to ready themselves for the first push toward Japan.

Marcello: When did you leave the islands?

Bedell: Well, I can't tell you the date. If I could tell you the date when they invaded Kwajalein, that was our first trip into a war zone. Of course, other than December 7, we had never seen anything that even resembled a war zone. Then there was Kwajalein, and then there was Eniwetok, Saipan, Tinian, Okinawa. That's where we wound up, in Okinawa.

Marcello: Were you in in all those?

Bedell: Oh, yes.

Marcello: So you had quite a few experiences after Pearl Harbor that were a lot more dangerous.

Bedell: Yes. We had an outfit went in at Tarawa; we went into Kwajalein, Saipan, Tinian.

Marcello: Were you in on all those invasions?

Bedell: I was in Kwajalein; I was at Eniwetok; I was at Saipan; I was at Tinian; and I was at Okinawa. That's where I wound up. I was in on five invasions altogether.

Marcello: Actually, of all those things you mentioned. probably you were safest during the Pearl Harbor attack (chuckle).

Bedell: Right (laughter). The first time, Kwajalein, you didn't know what to expect. We were not trained as combat troops.

When we came in on this beach, on this sand spit, and see all this destruction and all the devastation and all the casualties, for an outfit that's for all intents and purposes a telephone communications outfit, this is unbelievable. You're frightened of this. Hey, if you hang around on this island long enough, you could get yourself killed here.

Marcello: Unfortunately, that's beyond the scope of our interviews. Sometimes it gets very frustrating when I'm not able to talk to you guys about those experiences that you had after Pearl. Mr. Bedell, I want to thank you very much for having spoken to me.

Bedell: Well, the pleasure has been all mine. Like I told you before, I certainly didn't have any hair-raising experiences, and there were no deeds of valor that I could even think of trying to credit myself with. It was a case many times of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. But if I had to do it over again, hey, I'd head for Hickam Field tomorrow morning--if I had to do it again. I think it was the greatest experience any man could ever have. Sometimes I get frustrated with the young people, and then sometimes I think that maybe their ideas are right. Maybe we should try their ideas.

Marcello: When you say it was the greatest experience a man could have, you mean being in the service.

Bedell: Being in the service, right. The entire time I was in the

service, yes.

Marcello: Okay. Well, once again, I want to thank you very much for having participated.

Bedell: Well, it has been all my pleasure, and it has certainly been nice of you to take time out to interview me. I know you've heard quite a few harrowing tales from the survivors. This interview will be something of a keepsake. Of course, I have a son, and he's thirty-years-old. Hey, next to General MacArthur, he probably thought we were the only two people in the Pacific (laughter).