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Interview with  
ERNEST GALEASSI  
September 16, 1988

Place of Interview: Cape Girardeau, Missouri  
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello  
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Approved: *Ernest Galeassi*  
(Signature)  
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Oral History Collection

Ernest Galeassi

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello                      Date: September 16, 1988

Place of Interview: Cape Girardeau, Missouri

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Ernest Galeassi for the University of North Texas Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on September 16, 1988, in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. I'm interviewing Mr. Galeassi in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was at Hickam Field during the Japanese attack there and at Pearl Harbor and the other military installations on December 7, 1941. More specifically, Mr. Galeassi was a member of the 324th Signal Company, which was a part of the 18th Bomb Wing.

Mr. Galeassi, to begin this interview, very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born--that sort of thing.

Mr. Galeassi: I was born on September 6, 1920, in Lynn, Massachusetts.

Dr. Marcello: Tell me a little bit about your education.



Galeassi: Well, I went to two years of high school and Brooklyn Automotive Trades in Brooklyn, New York.

Marcello: And it was called what?

Galeassi: Brooklyn Automotive Trades.

Marcello: Okay. That was the name of the school?

Galeassi: Yes. It was a vocational school.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you joined the service.

Galeassi: I was in the New York National Guard in 1938 until I joined the Army on June 16, 1939.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the service in 1939?

Galeassi: Well, I was single and I wanted to go someplace. I first volunteered for the Philippines, but that was filled up, so then I applied for Panama and it was filled up, so I took Hawaii. I left New York in November of 1939 on the US Army Transport Republic. We went from Pier 59 in Brooklyn, to Panama through the locks to the Pacific side, and wound up at Fort Mason in San Francisco, where we were disembarked. We went to Fort McDowell, where we had to stay six days while they resupplied the ship.

Marcello: Let me ask you a couple of questions at this point. Why did you decide to join the service in 1939?

Galeassi: I just wanted something to do, and jobs were hard to get. I was young. I was eighteen years old, so I was looking for a little adventure. I thought that if I put two years in over there, I should come back, you know,

in time. So what happened to my three-year enlistment wound up as five years and eleven-and-a-half months.

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

Galeassi: I went down and took the test that they gave at the recruiting station, and the Army was what I came out as being qualified for. They put me in the quartermaster section. When I went to Hawaii, we disembarked from the US Army Transport Republic, USAT Republic, on December 13, 1939. Every soldier on the ship was sent to Fort Armstrong for quarantine for twenty days. So on January 3 or 4, 1940, I was assigned to 259th Quartermaster Company at Hickam Field.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. Up to that point, you'd really had no basic training. Is that correct?

Galeassi: The training that I had was up at Fort Slocum, New York, before I ever got on the ship. We went down the East River to the Hudson River to Pier 59 in Brooklyn.

Marcello: What did basic training consist of at that time?

Galeassi: Basically marching. We didn't have too many rifles, so we were using wooden rifles back in them days for target practice. Other than that, if you volunteered for something...if they said they wanted somebody that typed, you'd better watch out because you'd get a shovel and pick, and they'd put you on that. But I wound up in the office, and I was filing clothing forms from World



War I. All the time I was there, I was filing these World War I forms. I was in the Regular Army, and my serial number is 6975557, which meant Regular Army, 1st Corps Area in New York.

Marcello: You mentioned that you get to the Hawaiian Islands...

Galeassi: On the 13th of December.

Marcello: ...and that after a period of quarantine, you were placed in the 259th Quartermaster Company.

Galeassi: That's right.

Marcello: What kind of activities or functions would you be doing there?

Galeassi: I was working in the packing and crating shop where you packed and crated the people's furniture that was to go back to the States--to be shipped back. I didn't like that deal, and I requested a transfer. In September of 1940, I went to the 324th Signal Company, which the date that they made it was the 1st of October, 1940. So I was the new person in the new outfit that they just made.

Marcello: What was your function within the 324th Signal Company?

Galeassi: I was a telephone lineman. Also, I was a company mechanic. We had twelve ton-and-a-half trucks, four motorcycles, four jeeps, four command cars, and one two-and-a-half-ton truck, which was the truck that I took care of, with the extra gasoline and maintenance equipment on it. I was taking care of the truck.

Marcello: And did you essentially have that responsibility at the time of the Japanese attack?

Galeassi: I most certainly did.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk a little bit about life in the Army there at Hickam Field in that period before the attack. I want to make it clear for the record that you were in the Army. You were not in the Army Air Corps.

Galeassi: No, I was in the Army Signal Corps.

Marcello: And you simply happened to be stationed at Hickam Field.

Galeassi: That's right.

Marcello: Were your quarters located? Did you live right there at Hickam?

Galeassi: We lived right at Hickam in a two-story barracks, but for eighteen months we lived in a tent. Then we moved into the big barracks for three months prior to December 7. Then we moved out and into the new wooden quarters right across from the base exchange at Hickam.

Marcello: So when you originally went to Hickam Field, you were staying in that area that was known as "Tent City."

Galeassi: "Tent City," that's right. I spent eighteen months there.

Marcello: I'm sure that wasn't the best living in the world.

Galeassi: No. That dirt over there was really gooey, like glue, when you walked in it. A lot of times you had to take your shoes off when it was raining and carry them to where your workplace was. After you got through there



and you got down there, you'd wash your feet off and put your socks and shoes on.

Marcello: Describe what it was like living in the two-story barracks.

Galeassi: All right. In the two-story barracks I lived on the first floor. My bed was about in the middle of the barracks on the side facing the big barracks. Usually, every Sunday morning I'd get up and go to Catholic Mass at 6:30. It so happened on December 7 that I got up and went to church at 6:30. This building during the week was a basketball place. Then on Friday nights or Saturday nights, it was a place for them to dance. On Sunday it was held for services. The Catholic service was at 6:30, and then they had another one later on at 9:00. So I went to 6:30 Mass.

Marcello: Okay, I don't want to talk about that yet because that's getting too far ahead of the story. But we'll come back and talk about that in a moment. Describe what the food was like there at Hickam Field in that period prior to the war.

Galeassi: Well, it wasn't bad at all. We had very good food unless you was out on maneuvers and you had the old hardtack. Prior to December 7, the food was real good. We had pork and regular beef (steaks and "SOS") and a lot of beans. We always had a lot of fresh milk from Hawaii there itself and lots of pineapple. You never



ran out of pineapples (chuckle).

Marcello: What were the inside of your quarters like there in that two-story barracks?

Galeassi: Well, me and seventeen other guys were on the same floor, and it wasn't bad at all. We had to get up every morning...we got up at 5:30 and first went outside and had our rifles and did exercises with them and calisthenics. Then at 6:00 we went back in and made up our beds and then had chow. Then we'd go to work.

Marcello: How did the liberty routine work for you there at Hickam in that period before the war?

Galeassi: Well, you could always get on a bus from Hickam Field to downtown Honolulu. It cost fifteen cents. Of course, back in them days, you only got \$21 or \$30 a month, so you had to watch out how you managed your money. I always took seven dollars from my check and had it sent to my sister's house and put in a savings account. I'd go downtown maybe once for twice, maybe three times, probably to Waikiki. Sometimes we'd take one of the government trucks, and half a dozen of us would go down there and do that.

One time coming back from Waikiki, a little Chinaman hit our truck. A fellow named Hutchison was sitting back there with me, and we had three guys in the front of the cab. The old Chinaman hit us broadside, and Hutchison wound up with a broken collar bone, and I

wound up, after two-and-a-half turns, with the...it wasn't bamboo. It was those deals that go in the back of the truck to hold up the canvas.

Marcello: Staves or whatever they're called.

Galeassi: Yes. The thing broke, and I wound up underneath the truck. I don't know where all the people came from, but that truck was lifted off of me, and they took me to Queen's Hospital in Honolulu. They taped up my chest. I had a couple of cracked ribs, but it didn't bother me or interfere with my duty. So that's one bad experience (chuckle).

Marcello: How often could you get liberty there at Hickam?

Galeassi: Well, on Wednesday afternoons you would either play ball or do whatever you wanted. On Saturdays or Sundays, if you wasn't on duty, you could go ahead and go. I was the head telephone operator of the signal company for G-2 at Hickam, so I had people scheduled for the telephone deals, you know, eight-hour shifts. If they had another duty, I'd take their place. Other than that, it wasn't too bad.

Marcello: Could you, if you had the money and the desire, stay for the weekend? In other words, if you got off on a Friday, could you theoretically stay until Monday morning if you had the money and the desire?

Galeassi: If you had the money and the desire, you could stay and get a room at the YMCA in downtown Honolulu, which



wasn't bad. They had everything, even bellboys, and it was down the middle part of town.

Marcello: I guess normally it was best to come back to the base because you didn't have that much money to stay over, did you?

Galeassi: That's right. Fifteen cents is all it cost to go back from Honolulu or Waikiki all the way to the base. That's cheap transportation!

Marcello: What kind of activity or entertainment was there on the base if you didn't want to go into town?

Galeassi: Well, I played softball a lot with my signal company. I'd catch, be the catcher. We won the championship there a couple of years in a row prior to Pearl Harbor. We were called staff troops, and we wound up with the championship softball team.

Marcello: It was called staff troops?

Galeassi: Right. Staff troops were made up of the finance people, Signal Corps people, the Quartermaster Corps, and so on like that, and ordnance. They were a part of the staff troops.

Marcello: Now there was also a place on Hickam referred to as the Snake Ranch, wasn't there?

Galeassi: "El Rancho Snako" (laughter).

Marcello: Describe what kind of an establishment this was.

Galeassi: This was a place where you could go and get your beer, Primo or Acme or whatever it was, for ten cents a

bottle. The old saying is that "you walked in and crawled out." We used to have a lot of people from the Navy Yard come over there, Marines and so forth. It was a nice place, but you had to know your limits. I didn't drink too much, but I'd go up there once in a while.

Marcello: How prevalent was gambling on Hickam Field during that pre-Pearl Harbor period? I know there was a lot of it up at Schofield Barracks, and I was wondering how that applied to Hickam.

Galeassi: I will try to give it to you as it was. We usually got paid on the 7th of the month.

Marcello: Right.

Galeassi: Then the people on Hickam would all gamble, and the winners from that gambling would go down to Schofield at the end of the month for gambling. I knew one man who was a master sergeant, and he was the...I'm not going to say what he was, but he was a quartermaster. He came back one time with a new car that he won up there besides all the money he won. So gambling was quite a thing to do.

Marcello: And there were big stakes in some of those games.

Galeassi: That's right, and even in dice games.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that this kind of activity was forbidden but that it went on anyhow?

Galeassi: Oh, I would say so, yes.

Marcello: I guess what I'm saying is, I'm sure that this activity



wasn't condoned by those in charge of the base.

Galeassi: No. But all the big gamblers from all over the island, whether it was the Army or whoever they were, would meet up in Schofield to see who was going to win all the big stakes, you know.

Marcello: You were talking about the fact that you played softball.

Galeassi: Right.

Marcello: How much emphasis was placed upon athletics and sports there at Hickam Field? Again, what I'm trying to do is compare it with Schofield, because I know at Schofield barracks they actually recruited athletes and had some outstanding teams up there.

Galeassi: Right. Well, I think it's more or less got to be in your system. I liked to lift weights one night a week. I'd run, I'd also play softball all the time, and once in a while I'd play basketball. I kept myself busy doing those things. When I wasn't doing that, I was reading. So I wasn't what you'd call a loner because I had friends. We'd go and have a hamburger across the road there at the Hickam PX. We'd get a hamburger and shake for about forty cents, so that ain't bad. I don't think the emphasis was too much, although there was a fellow in our signal company named John Andre, who wound up as a professional baseball player with the Chicago White Sox, I believe. He played for the 7th Air Force

team as a pitcher. Now that's where you get your professional deals because when Hickam became headquarters for the 7th Air Force, which I was in the 400th Signal Company then, they brought a whole team from Anderson Air Force Base, which included Joe DiMaggio, Jog Gordon, Bill Dickey, and all those guys.

Marcello: Now this would have been after the war actually started.

Galeassi: Right. So they had a good baseball team. In fact, they had the Little World Series over there. The Navy brought in there a bunch from all over the Pacific, and the Navy beat them guys, I think, two out of three games or whatever it was.

Marcello: What kind of planes would normally be operating at Hickam Field?

Galeassi: Well, we had B-17's, and we had A-20's. There was an old B-12, but I never seen it fly. And I told you about the B-18's.

Marcello: In fact, the B-18's probably were the ones that you had there the most. Weren't you just getting in the B-17's?

Galeassi: No, we had a squadron of B-17's, and they left Hickam Field in November of 1941, before the start of Pearl Harbor. They went to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines, so that left us with the new bunch that was coming in on December 7. That B-17 that's in that picture was there just before it left to go to the Philippines. That whole squadron went to the



Philippines.

Marcello: Okay, what you're referring to is a booklet that you have, which, in essence, is a history of the first fifty years of Hickam Field.

Galeassi: Right.

Marcello: Is it not true that Hickam Field was right next door to the Pearl Harbor Navy Base? There was nothing but a chain-link fence there.

Galeassi: That's true. That is true. We had what they call a boat down there that went out, if there was a crash, to pick up any survivors, and that was down around Bishop's Point. If you kept on going around, you came into Fort "Kam" (Kamehameha), and across the bay from Fort "Kam" was Fort Weaver. They were coast artillery and also had antiaircraft batteries there.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to get worse, could you at that time detect any changes at all in the training routine of you personally or of the base in general?

Galeassi: Well, what really happened was that we went out on an alert on the island, and we all were in the field. We was attached to the 24th Infantry Division from Schofield on this field training exercise while we were on alert. We had radio communications people and our telephone setup, BD-96 switchboard. We went out on a

Wednesday, and on Saturday morning they told us to pack our gear and go back to our home stations. So our signal company rolled up all our wire and put our switchboard away and put our radio equipment in, and all our trucks got in a convoy and went back to Hickam. We got in there at about 11:00 in the morning, and we unloaded our trucks and put the trucks in line. Then that afternoon I watched all the battleships come into Pearl. Of course, I thought, "Well, things must be all right."

Marcello: And what day of the week was this?

Galeassi: This was on Saturday afternoon.

Marcello: Saturday afternoon.

Galeassi: December 6th.

Marcello: So you had been on an alert all that week.

Galeassi: Right.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. Let's go back beyond that week before Pearl Harbor. Had you been on any alerts and so on during that period of time?

Galeassi: No.

Marcello: In other words, it was business as usual for you right up until that last week before the Pearl Harbor attack.

Galeassi: Right. Then we went out, and we were on training. We were out on alert status.

Marcello: What did that mean for you? When you went out on that alert, you mentioned that you go out into the field.



What were you personally doing?

Galeassi: I was stringing wire for the telephone operations. We a ton-and-a-half truck which rolled off the wire to put the WE-8 telephones in use with batteries.

Marcello: I'm sorry, what kind of telephones?

Galeassi: WE-8. They're old Army telephones, field phones.

Marcello: WE-8.

Galeassi: Yes, it's an Army field phone, and you use BA-30 batteries in it. The switchboard operator...all you've got to do is crank it, and it goes into the switchboard, and the switchboard will answer it. Then he'll give it to whatever outfit that you wanted. So we had enough for maybe ninety-three or ninety-four telephones.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were working in conjunction with the 24th Infantry.

Galeassi: Right. We was attached to them during the alert.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. Let us suppose that some sort of an attack did occur at Hickam. Did the 324th Signal Company have a specific place to go or a function to perform?

Galeassi: Just communications. Our deal...if something was happening and we were attacked, we also had up in the hill right above Pearl Harbor, like, a shaft which was a hundred feet down in the ground, and in that area of the ground was a switchboard all set up and radio communications all set up, which was for them to go up

there--the general and his people to go down there where they could still have communications.

Marcello: So your function, in other words, was to maintain communications.

Galeassi: Right.

Marcello: And would that in essence mean that you could be going here, there, and yonder in order to do that?

Galeassi: Yes. I'd have to once in a while take our two-and-a-half-ton truck and take some supplies up to the mountains. Now my commanding officer was Colonel Hoskins, who came to us as a second lieutenant when he came to us from the 21st Infantry at Schofield. He got his reserve commission as a second lieutenant. The first part of December, we took him down in sort of a Coast Guard boat, and we went down to Wake Island with some of our radio engineers, radio people. I remember one of them, Corporal Rex, who was the last one to sign off. He was the last one to sign off when the Japs took over Wake Island. Hoskins did make it back to Honolulu, and he came back around, I think, the December 8 or 9, 1941. I went down and picked them up at the dock and brought them back out to Hickam, and he thought he was going to get chewed out because he wasn't there. He came back to get more equipment to take down there.

Marcello: Okay, let's get back to the alerts and so on. We do know that on December 7, the bombers at Hickam were



lined up in nice, neat rows. Why was that done?

Galeassi: Well, after they canceled the alert on the 7th, they went ahead and brought everything...this is true also about the pursuit ships up at Wheeler Field. The day before they were all dispersed in different areas where it would be hard to hit them. The next day, on Saturday afternoon when the alert was called off, all these aircraft were lined up four abreast. The same thing happened at Hickam, and they were on the apron. They lined them up.

Marcello: And how many abreast were lined up? How were they lined up at Hickam that day?

Galeassi: The only things that we had left were the B-18's and the A-20's. I think there was one squadron of A-20's, but I don't remember seeing one of them getting off the ground. I remember one of the B-18's trying to get off the ground.

Marcello: We're getting ahead of the story, and I don't want to get to that point yet.

Galeassi: I'd say there were three abreast probably.

Marcello: Was any thought ever given to the possibility that the Japanese living in the Hawaiian Islands might be a threat in the form of sabotage?

Galeassi: The only thing I know about that is they said that they were, but I don't really know if that's true or not.

Marcello: One of the things that I have heard was that the planes

were lined up in those nice, neat rows because it would be easier to guard them against saboteurs. Is that a possibility?

Galeassi: Well, no, because that jurisdiction came under what they called the ground battalion that they had there with special troops and all. They were set up to man machine guns and guard the aircraft. A lot of them people got killed on December 7.

Marcello: Okay, so you mentioned that you go on this alert. When did it begin?

Galeassi: It started on a Wednesday morning, so you go back to the 6th, the 5th the 4th--yes, three-and-a-half days.

Marcello: You were out in the field, and you mentioned that then on Friday it was called off.

Galeassi: Well, Saturday morning.

Marcello: Saturday morning it was called off.

Galeassi: Yes. We was given orders to go back to Hickam.

Marcello: Once the alert is called off and you're back at Hickam, what was your routine for the rest of that day--the rest of that Saturday?

Galeassi: Well, we went to the chow hall, and when I came back me and another fellow went down toward Bishop's Point and watched the battlewagons come in. After they came in at Bishop's Point heading toward Ford Island--they used to call it Battleship Row over there--we went back and just horsed around. I got me a book to read until the next



morning.

Marcello: So you stayed on base on that Saturday night.

Galeassi: Right.

Marcello: Why did you decide to that as opposed to going into town. It was payday was it not?

Galeassi: No, we didn't get paid. It was Sunday when we got paid.

Marcello: That's right. The 7th was payday, yes.

Galeassi: We didn't get paid because it was Sunday (chuckle). We did get paid on the 10th, but we had a wait because what they did with every dollar bill, five-dollar bill, whatever money they were passing out, had "Hawaii" written on it so in case the Japanese did come in and infiltrate the island and take it over, the money wouldn't be no good to them.

Marcello: Okay, did anything eventful happen that Saturday night of December 6, 1941, while you were back at the base?

Galeassi: I think we had a dance over in the area like I told you that they used for church the following morning.

Marcello: Did you go there or did you stay back in the barracks?

Galeassi: I stayed back in the barracks. I went over and had a coke or something like that right across the street from it. At that time they used to have what they called the Noncoms' Club, you know, corporals', sergeants' club.

Marcello: You mentioned this barracks that you stayed in. Was this the one that is usually referred to as the consolidated barracks?

Galeassi: No.

Marcello: That's a different one altogether?

Galeassi: Yes. They've got the name in here for that barracks [refers to booklet]. They called it the Hale Makai. That's what that barracks was called.

Marcello: The one that you stayed in?

Galeassi: I moved out of there in September of 1941 into the wooden barracks. The roof of that barracks burnt for a week.

Marcello: So this one that you were in was called Hale Makai?

Galeassi: I was there up until September of 1941, and then I moved into the wooden barracks. They took our signal company...we was on the third floor, and they moved us out and into the wooden barracks.

Marcello: Well, this one looks like a wooden barracks.

Galeassi: It's not (chuckle). That's cement.

Marcello: Okay, you were not in this barracks at the time of Pearl Harbor.

Galeassi: I moved out of there three months before. They just opened up those wooden barracks, and we moved into them.

Marcello: So you went from "Tent City" into this Hale Makai Barracks and then from there to the wooden structure.

Galeassi: Right.

Marcello: Okay. Where was that newest barracks, that wooden structure, located with reference to the airfield itself, the aprons?



Galeassi: About three blocks.

Marcello: Did you have a pretty clear view of the aprons from where you were?

Galeassi: Oh, yes, sure. See, we worked up in base operations. We worked right up in the second floor, and we had a switchboard up there. We had radio operators in there, also, which were taking down code twenty-four hours a day.

Marcello: Okay, this brings us into that Sunday morning of December 7, 1941, and, of course, we want to go into this day in as much detail as you can remember. On a Sunday morning, was there a particular time when anybody had to get up?

Galeassi: No. But I got up because I'd go to 6:30 Mass, so I got up at 6:00.

Marcello: Okay, describe your procedure from that point.

Galeassi: I got up at 6:00 and got dressed and shaved, and I went to Mass, which is in the building that, as I told you, was a gymnasium in the daytime and nighttime was a place for a dance. Then on the weekends it was our church. Being a Catholic, I went to the Catholic Mass at 6:30. It was at 6:30.

At 7:15 we got out, and I went over to our barracks where our chow hall was and had breakfast. Me and another fellow--I forget who he was--sat down on the front steps of the barracks, and at about 7:50, 7:55, I

looked across the airfield and seen all these airplanes coming. I said to that guy, "Hey, we don't have no aircraft carriers in here! They left here a couple days ago!" I said, "They look like our planes, don't they?" He said, "Well, they look like them." They came across from where the International Airport is in Honolulu right now.

They started coming over our barracks, and if you could have stood on the top of the roof on that two-story barracks, you could have hit the torpedoes with your hand. That's when I seen the red emblem under there, and I went in and I told the rest of our people in our barracks, "We're being attacked! You better get out of here!" They thought I was kidding until they heard a big explosion over at Pearl. Then I got me one guy named Ovelsby, who they'd just let out of the "jug." He was from Kentucky. He was in the brig, and when that attack came they let all the prisoners in the brig go back to their organizations. I told him, "You come with me! We're going to move our trucks!" We got all our trucks moved, and our captain, who was Captain Blank, didn't come in until 9:30. He was still in Honolulu.

Marcello: Let me back up just a second. So what is your particular rank at this time?

Galeassi: I was a private.

Marcello: You see the Japanese planes.



Galeassi: Right.

Marcello: They are obviously flying very, very low.

Galeassi: They are.

Marcello: You go back into the barracks, and you alert the rest of the people. Once that's done, then, where do you go and what do you do?

Galeassi: I went down to where I worked, which was in our motor pool. We had all these trucks, and I had to get them out and get them under trees so we wouldn't lose them. But we did lose one truck.

Marcello: You were a private, and this was your responsibility.

Galeassi: Right.

Marcello: You did not take this responsibility on your own? This is something that you were supposed to do?

Galeassi: That was my job. So I got everything out except one truck. We lost one ton-and-a-half Chevrolet truck which we picked up a week before at the pier.

Marcello: Okay, so how far was the barracks from the motor pool?

Galeassi: Two blocks.

Marcello: Describe your journey from the barracks to the motor pool. Is there anything that happened during that period of time?

Galeassi: Well, there was strafing on the airstrip, and what I did was go on down to the boundary between Hickam--the chain fence--and Pearl. There were also palm trees there, and we got these trucks, and we ran them down and put them

underneath those trees.

Marcello: Okay, so down at the motor pool, then, those trees were out in the open.

Galeassi: Right.

Marcello: You mentioned that you lost one of your trucks.

Galeassi: Right.

Marcello: Describe how that took place.

Galeassi: Well, Ovelsby was driving this truck, and I don't know how he did it, but the truck was completely demolished.

Marcello: In other words, it was due to an accident as opposed to Japanese bombs or anything.

Galeassi: Right, right. After we got rid of all our equipment we had down there, I had to make two trips out to the supply dump. We had to get shovels and picks so they could start digging trenches and so forth to get into. I made two trips across there, and on the second trip across the lower part of the airstrip, I had to get out because the Japanese aircraft was coming down strafing. So I got out, and I got behind a concrete pillar where they were going to build an airfield. When they passed I got back into the truck and moved on out to where the bomb dump was and shovels and stuff was and brought back ammunition and the shovels.

Marcello: During this period of time, would you describe things as being organized or confused?

Galeassi: I would say part of it was confusion and part of it was



organized because you could see the aircraft coming in and strafing, and you could get out of their way. Of course, our signal company had .45's, and shooting a .45 at an aircraft is like a taking a pea and throwing it at it.

Marcello: There are a couple of other things that I want to ask on the basis of your comments. First of all, were people essentially doing things on their own, or was there somebody there giving orders at this time?

Galeassi: Well, we had some lieutenants that was giving some of the orders to the radio operators and some of the telephone people. The captain of the place didn't come in until 9:30, and our first sergeant didn't come in until around that time, either.

Marcello: I suspect that they probably had a difficult time getting from wherever they were out to the base.

Galeassi: From Honolulu, yes.

Marcello: But in the case of you moving those trucks and so on, you did that on your own. Nobody had ordered you to do that.

Galeassi: That's right. I saved every one of them trucks except one.

Marcello: And until that point they were all out in the open and everything--lined up in a nice, neat row.

Galeassi: Lined up in our motor pool. We had our own motor pool just for our signal company.

Marcello: And how many vehicles were there altogether?

Galeassi: Well, you had twelve ton-and-a-halves, one two-and-a-half, four command cars, four jeeps, and four motorcycles.

Marcello: And how many people were moving those?

Galeassi: Just me and one other fellow, so we were running back and forth. I'd let him drive that one truck while I'd get another because I could drive all of them. I had a license to drive from a quarter-ton right up to a five-ton truck.

Marcello: You mentioned that later on, when you were on this mission to get these picks and shovels and so on, that you did come under strafing. Describe this in more detail.

Galeassi: Well, coming from the Fort Weaver side or the Ewa side of the island into where the planes were parked, the strafing aircraft from the Japanese was coming straight across the airfield and down toward the corner of the Hickam gate. You had to go across there, and once you got across that bottom part of the airfield, you were back in under the trees and so forth, so you were pretty well safe until you got out to that bomb dump.

Marcello: What kind of a vehicle did you have?

Galeassi: I had a ton-and-a-half Chevrolet.

Marcello: And were you the only one in the truck?

Galeassi: I was the only one in the truck.



Marcello: Was this occurring during the first half-hour or so of the attack?

Galeassi: No, it happened about 9:00.

Marcello: Okay, but the Japanese were still coming over at that time.

Galeassi: Oh, yes! They were coming over. They came over until a little after 10:00. I'll tell you something else, also. The church where I went to church at 6:30 was hit at 10:00 with one of those bombs, and by 10:30 it was burnt completely to the ground. The following week we were missing the boy who was the altar boy, and we went over and we looked in the ashes to see if we could find any remains of him. All we found was his dogtags. It was kind of a sad thing, you know, that he didn't get out.

Marcello: During this period of time, did you come under any of the bombs that were dropped by any of the planes?

Galeassi: No, I didn't come close to the bombs. After I got finished with that, I went back over to the orderly room, which was in another barracks not too far from where I was. That's when I seen Captain Blank and the other ones. We had to dive pretty close to the building there when they started strafing there. I seen some of the fellows that had rifles trying to shoot at the aircraft, but they never hit them.

Marcello: Were you personally armed in any way?

Galeassi: Yes, I had a .45.

Marcello: Where did you get it?

Galeassi: Well, I got it out of our armament room.

Marcello: In the barracks or over at the motor pool?

Galeassi: No, we had an armament room right in back of the orderly room. They had Thompson sub-machine guns, and we had .45's and one BAR Rifle (Browning Automatic).

Marcello: Did you do any firing at all with your .45?

Galeassi: I would have been better off if I threw it at them (laughter).

Marcello: Okay, now is order being brought about once Blank gets there?

Galeassi: Well, yes. He lost one of his shoes somewhere, and he was still in the same clothes. He didn't have a chance to get over to his billet to change clothes.

Marcello: So he had just one shoe on?

Galeassi: Yes. He lost one somewhere (chuckle). He was from Texas.

Marcello: Okay, now we also know that during the attack itself, a flight of B-17's was coming in from the mainland and hoping to land at Hickam Field. Do you remember anything about what happened?

Galeassi: I seen and could hear them coming in, but the problem was that they didn't have any fuel to go back out. Hickam was the closest place that they could land, and as they were landing the Japanese were tearing them up one right after the other. One of them did make it over



to the other island--I think the small island of Lanai--  
and crash-landed over there. They went over and  
salvaged it and brought it back.

Marcello: So the Japanese jumped all over those B-17's when they  
came in?

Galeassi: Oh, yes!

Marcello: Describe in more detail what you saw.

Galeassi: Well, I seen the flight of the B-17's coming in from  
Waikiki and getting into a landing pattern and then  
coming on around for their landing. As they started to  
land, the Japanese started strafing them and tearing  
them things right in two. They crashed and their wheels  
were flat and everything, and their propellers were no  
longer any good. One thing about them is that they  
didn't burn because they didn't have no gas left. They  
didn't have no ammunition either. I don't think they'll  
ever make that mistake again. You have a flight of B-  
17's coming from the mainland that had a machine guns on  
them with no ammunition to protect themselves. That was  
a major mistake.

Marcello: Okay, let's assume the attack is now over. What do you  
do in the aftermath of the attack?

Galeassi: Well, they wouldn't allow us to go back to our barracks  
for three days. I went ahead with the regular duties  
that I did. I went on back and got our trucks and put  
them back in the motor pool, serviced them, and made

sure our maintenance truck had fuel in it and everything. So we went back to our regular duties. The radio operators went up to base operations and sat down there, and they had shifts where they'd go in and monitor all the frequencies. I worked up on the switchboard on the second floor.

Marcello: Where did you stay during that period, since you mentioned you didn't go back to the barracks?

Galeassi: Well, I found a place down by the quartermaster warehouse, which was a concrete deal that you back up to, a dock. Right underneath there made a good place to stay.

Marcello: So you were looking for some sort of shelter in case they came back.

Galeassi: That's right! There were all kinds of rumors going around, saying that the Japanese were coming in on the north side of the island and that the 24th and 25th Divisions were over there fighting them. They were all rumors. Rumors was flying right and left.

Marcello: Considering what happened, did you believe those rumors or most of them?

Galeassi: No, not really because we would have had something on communications about it, and we didn't get any. Then they were bringing in people that were suspected of helping the Japanese and were interrogating them. I happened to get on guard duty there for eight hours, and



I had to watch out who I let pass going to the interrogation. They just happened to pick me for this assignment. You had to stay there with that rifle and let nobody in without proper credentials.

Marcello: What did you do that night?

Galeassi: That night?

Marcello: Of December 7th.

Galeassi: Well, we wasn't allowed to have no lights, no nothing. A couple of our trucks that was trying to get communications between Hickam and Fort "Kam" were being stopped every twenty yards or so, and they finally decided it wasn't worth it. They stopped and came back in. But I just stayed there and drank water. They said you were going to drink water boiled first because the rumor was that something had happened to the water supply. Then, of course, that's where Spam came in. You had sandwiches for the next three days.

Marcello: How safe was it to walk around that night?

Galeassi: Well, you was challenged. Let's say if you was out there, base security people were challenging everybody. You really had to watch yourself, and you had to give them your name and rank, and they would check you. Other than that, there were no lights. Even the lights on the truck, you know, had them little lights on there that you use for night driving. They had those on. You couldn't use anything other than that.

I remember, oh, maybe the second day that I had to take a secret message from Hickam over to Fort Shafter to the 9th Signal over there I had to use a motorcycle to go over there. I took one over there and got challenged again while I gave him the message on the 12th and then went back to Hickam on the motorcycle.

Marcello: Was there anybody else in your shelter that evening of December 7th?

Galeassi: No.

Marcello: You were there by yourself?

Galeassi: Yes. I found me a place right there. I used to work at that quartermaster building, and I knew pretty well that those boxes were pretty safe down in there. There was thick heavy concrete over it.

Marcello: What did you think about that night? What thoughts went through your mind?

Galeassi; Well, I thought I was supposed to get out and maybe leave Hawaii within the week. My time was up there. My two years was up, and I just lacked six months to get out. And there I am--I'm stuck for the rest of the war. So for that three-year enlistment I wound up giving five years and eleven months and sixteen days--for three years. I didn't have any leave, so I had all my leave coming to me--over seventy-five days or more. I could have come back to the States three months early with my leave because I had ninety days. But there I was.



Later on, you know, after the war when they paid terminal leave pay, they paid me for 120 days.

Marcello: What did you do the next day?

Galeassi: I went back to the base again, down at the motor pool and checked our trucks--just working as a mechanic again.

Marcello: When you had a chance to survey the damage that had been done out there on the flight line, describe for me what you saw and what your feelings were.

Galeassi: Well, I was kind of really hurt because I thought that with all our radar equipment we had up in the hills, and our signaling and our communications system, we should have caught these people before they ever got in there. You saw all these people that got killed just coming out of the barracks. The Japanese strafed them and were hitting these people at Pearl Harbor on them ships that didn't have a chance. You know, it's getting caught with your pants down. We never should have did that. We should have never got caught that way.

Marcello: What kind of damage did you see on the field?

Galeassi: Oh, on the big field itself there was...where the bombs hit there were craters, and the aircraft were all split up. All they were good for was spare parts or the junk yard. They never hit the old B-12's out there (chuckle), which was an antique aircraft. You probably never heard this from anybody else, but we did have one

of the B-18's that they loaded with bombs and tried to take off at Hickam and couldn't get up into the air. It wound up at Bishop's Point. The craft that they used went out and picked up survivors from the crash. The plane was sticking up in the water, so they had to take the bombs out and get a crane over there and pull it off.

Marcello: In other words, it didn't have enough lift with those bombs on it, and it actually took a nose dive into the area around Bishop's Point.

Galeassi: Yes.

Marcello: That's surprising that those bombs didn't explode when it did that.

Galeassi: Maybe it's surprising, but it didn't do it. They had to go over there and take them back out--the armament people did, ordnance.

Marcello: What was your attitude toward the Japanese in the aftermath of the attack?

Galeassi: Well, I was pretty damned mad. In fact, we had six radio operators that I told you were down there on the base, and that kind of burned me up, too, you know. During the war, the whole war, they had people on our radio section going down on different islands for ninety days TDY, and they set up radar and communications down there. Then they'd come back up for ninety days. You had the 5th and 11th Bomb Groups there, and by then we



were with the 7th Air Force. By that time we was now called the 400th Signal Company, 7th Air Force. We had nobody else to report to except the Air Force, 7th Air Force.

Marcello: What kind of damage was done to the hangars there?

Galeassi: Bad! It blew up some of them pretty good. The big hangar up there, which was a Hawaiian Air Depot, they did lots of damage to it. In fact, one of the Japanese airplanes crashed into it.

Marcello: What damage was done to the barracks?

Galeassi: Oh, the barracks was shot to pieces there, and that's the front page of that thing [refers to booklet].

Marcello: That's the consolidated barracks...

Galeassi: Yes.

Marcello: ...that was shot to pieces? That was the big barracks there.

Galeassi: That's the big barracks, yes. In fact, the roof had copper on top of the wood, and that wood underneath there burnt for a week. Then they had to replace the whole roof on top of the barracks, on the big barracks.

Marcello: What kind of damage was done to your barracks?

Galeassi: Just bullet holes through the screens, because we never had windows. We had nothing but screens over there, and the bullet holes did come through into some of the beds. It was a good thing we were all out of there. They wouldn't let us go back in for three days, anyway, while

they checked it out to make sure there wasn't no bombs in there that didn't explode.

Marcello: In essence, then, most of your belongings were pretty much intact in the barracks?

Galeassi: Right. They sure were!

Marcello: Was there very much resistance put up at Hickam Field anytime during the attack itself?

Galeassi: Yes. The ground forces had put up .30- and .50-caliber machine gun deals and were firing at the Japanese. But the problem was that they didn't have anything around them, no sandbags or anything, you know, until a little later on, so they were getting wiped out. The majority of the ones that was killed at Hickam during that period of time was the ones that were in that big barracks.

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

Galeassi: We did training, a lot of marching, different things. But mostly it was to keep yourself busy. We played ball and stuff. Once in a while we'd go to town. I very seldom went to town, maybe once or twice a month, and then I'd either go down and see a movie or something like that. You could stay on the base and go to the movie for ten cents. But it was the idea that you'd get out and get downtown. You had to wear a uniform no matter where you went, so civilian clothes was out.

Marcello: How long did you stay there on the Hawaiian Islands



before you moved out?

Galeassi: We left in October of 1944 to the "Repo" depot over on the other side of Fort "Kam," and I caught a Navy ship out of Pier 9 in Honolulu and went back to the United States in November of 1944. I went back to Oklahoma, and from Oklahoma I went back out to California. When I went to Long Beach, California, they asked me where I wanted to go to be stationed, and I said, "I want to go East." And they sent me to Luke Field in Arizona in the middle of the desert--110 degrees in the shade, and there was no shade.

Marcello: Is that where you were mustered out of the service?

Galeassi: No. I had a 130 points when they started letting them out on points, so they sent me from Luke Field to Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, and I got discharged on May 25 at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, with 20 percent disability on my legs. I got arthritis while I was down there. We got nothing but pork and all that other junk that they had. I got so that I couldn't eat any of it, and I'd just throw it in the trash. Our signal company got together, and each one of us donated two dollars. We had 125 there, so that was \$250. We had the Air Corps go over there to the other island, and they would buy us a beef and bring it back. Then we'd have some pretty good meat. Everybody had a steak once a month, and we had good stew meat and good hamburger and stuff, so we did

pretty good like that. I still don't eat Spam (laughter). It took me a long time, in fact, to where I could eat pineapple.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Galeassi, I think that's a pretty good place to end this interview. We have pretty well covered your experiences at Pearl Harbor. I want to thank you very much for having taken time to talk with me. You've said a lot of interesting and important things, and I'm sure that students and scholars will find your comments most useful.

Galeassi: Well, I hope so. I hope we never go through it again!