

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Pearl Harbor Project

Personal Experience

O. H. 440

JOHN HORM

Interviewed

by

Hugh Earnhart

on

March 28, 1980

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: JOHN HORM

INTERVIEWER: Hugh Earnhart

SUBJECT: Seabees, Navy, Schofield Barracks

DATE: March 28, 1980

E: This is an interview with John W. Horm for the Youngstown State University Pearl Harbor Project, by Hugh Earnhart, at 8315 Glenwood Avenue, on March 28, 1980, at approximately 8:30 p.m.

Mr. Horm, tell me a little bit about your childhood, family, schooling.

H: I was brought up during the Depression. I went to school in Steubenville, Ohio. I left school just before graduation. Then I received a diploma through GED. During the Depression I would just hang around street corners. Most of my time was spent on the farm. I went in the service on April 30, 1941.

E: What did your parents do?

H: My father was a railroader; he worked for Wierton Steel Corporation.

Before graduation came around I tried to get a job. Prior to graduating I saw the opportunity to go into the service.

E: Growing up in the Depression days, do you remember things like soup kitchens, bread lines?

H: No, I think I was a little too young. I was young to graduate from high school; I was only sixteen when I went into the service. I lied about my age. My parents went along. I wanted to relieve the family, one less mouth to feed.

E: Why did you select the Army?

- H: I didn't really select the Army. The Navy wouldn't have me because I was too tall. I had gone to Pittsburgh to a recruiter and all the recruiting stations were in the basement of the old post offices. When you walked in they had pipes; if you had to bend down, forget it. They suggested the Army.
- E: What kind of examination did they give when you enlisted?
- H: All I can really remember is a written examination and a physical.
- E: Did you have the feeling that they were simply taking people in or were they really trying to be selective?
- H: I think they were trying to be selective; I don't know. I do remember that there were three stations: Panama, Hawaii, and Philippines. I chose Hawaii because of the glamour and so forth. I'm glad I didn't choose the Philippines.
- E: Where did they send you for boot training?
- H: The port of departation was Fort Slocum, New York. I took my boot training in Hawaii.
- E: You went straight there?
- H: Yes. I enlisted on April 30 and I went to Fort Slocum. They shipped us across country and we were quarantined at Fort McDowell, California because on the way across country somebody contracted Scarlet Fever. I think the quarantine was for a week and ten days. I remember landing in Hawaii on June 17.
- E: You traveled by train across the United States?
- H: Yes.
- E: Then by ship?
- H: Then by ship from San Francisco.
- E: What ship did you go on?
- H: U.S.S. President Taft.
- E: Do you remember anything about that trip?
- H: Not too much. It was five days. They were all recruits. Some of us went to Hawaii and some were going on to the Philippines. Half of the ship was going to the Philippines.
- E: Did you get into Pearl during the day?

- H: We went into Honolulu Harbor. From there we were sent up to Schofield on the OR&R, Oahu Railroad.
- E: What do you remember about Schofield when you first got there?
- H: They sent us up to a quarantine area, which was really a tent city. We were there seven or eight weeks. When we did get down to the permanent barracks I had never seen a place as clean. That regiment that I went into, the 35th Infantry, we did all the parades for the celebrities, officials.
- E: Was this kind of an honor company?
- H: Yes. It was a regiment, but that's all we did was parade. I remember that in September of October of 1941, we did a parade for Shirley Temple. Part of our regiment was her honor guard. Everybody in the regiment at the time was 5'10" or better. They specified that you had to be 5'10" or taller because we were the show outfit of the whole island.
- E: You didn't get any kind of combat training?
- H: Very little. There were three other regiments: the 19th, 21st, and 27th. They were in the field all of the time.
- E: This 35th Infantry was kind of a lead group?
- H: Yes. Plus they were prevalent in athletics: football, boxing, baseball.
- E: Was it because it was better than the other units?
- H: Each company had their own mess. It depended on the company mess sergeant, how much they spent. Each company was allotted so much per man. They did their own buying. Every once in a while they would save a little bit and then every month or two have a little party.
- E: How many made up that company?
- H: I believe there were 220 to a company.
- E: What was their responsibility, just simply to be spit and polish, be available for ceremonies?
- H: Right.
- E: What was a typical liberty like?
- H: We had an inspection every Saturday. After

inspection you had a permanent pass which you would use to go to Honolulu, Hawaii, Oahu. I normally went up to the north shore because the living was a little cheaper. You could buy a beer for 10¢ instead of 15¢. The people were nice too because you weren't going into an area where the sailors, the Marines, and the soldiers were all going. The beaches on the north shore are a little better too.

E: Was this pass good until 0800 Monday?

H: No, it would be until 0530 Monday morning.

E: Most of you came back Sunday night?

H: Yes. Reveille was 5:30. Stand to was 6:00.

E: Is there anything else you would like to mention about those days prior to that important day? What about the type of people there? Did anyone stand out?

H: There were a couple of people who I had respect for. I remember my company commander, James B. Lear; he was one of the finest persons. Also, a second lieutenant, Stanley B. Larson, he worked himself up until he was Lieutenant General during Vietnam. He was in charge of the pacific operations.

E: What about promotions? What was your rank on December 7?

H: I was Private First Class. After the influx of draftees and so forth it went pretty fast. When I came back to the States in 1943, I had just been made First Sergeant. I was excess baggage every place I went. Every place I went there were enough First Sergeants. December 7, 1944, they discharged me, and I stayed out two years. I went back in and put in two years and then I went into the reserves. I spent twenty-nine years in the reserves.

E: What were you doing on December 7, 1941 when that attack came?

H: I had just gotten out of the shower. I felt something shaking and I ran to the window. I think it was one of the first bombs dropped. We were the second quadrangle west of Wheeler Field. The prime objective was to get the fighter base first. As I got out of the shower, I felt the building shake. I ran to the window, and saw the smoke coming out of our motor pool. Nobody really knew what was going on. You couldn't see the planes from where we were, but I would say within fifteen minutes some composure had come back. We knew what we were supposed to do.

E: Was there any feeling among the 35th that there was a possibility of Pearl being a target?

H: No. There were no feelings whatsoever because everything was going along so easy. This was a Sunday morning on December 7; we had been paid on December 3; we couldn't rationalize it.

On Sunday morning I had gotten up, just showered, and was getting ready to go to breakfast. I never did get that breakfast.

E: What did you do, throw on some clothes?

H: Yes. I threw on clothes and had things to do to get ready. We were moved back as reserves. First and third battalion were on beach position.

E: This attack move came. What happened between the time the first wave came in?

H: You don't realize how long it take the mobilization to get ready to go.

E: I assume that Schofield barracks wre not under attack then?

H: It was, but they really didn't care about us. What could a foot soldier to?

E: Do you know anybody that went out and tried to shoot at anything flying over?

H: I imagine there were.

E: As you look back on it now, did you feel that your company was pretty well organized once they realized they had to do something?

H: I think so. Our prime duty in the company that I was in was to set up communications, field to headquarters, reconnaissance, and so forth.

E: What about the waves, there were three waves that came in? Did it seem like that to you or did it seem like it was all one, continuous attack?

H: It seemed like one, continuous attack.

E: Do you recall any of the attack down in the harbor itself?

H: The only thing that I really saw was the burning. You could see it from my position. The actual bombing, no, I didn't see that.

E: You weren't in any of the clean up detail then?

H: No.

E: When you went out on station, what were your duties out there as far as the 35th was concerned?

H: Ours was reconnaissance, intelligence, setting up communications and so forth.

E: What about those submarines? Was there any concern on the part of anyone in your company that they were tested to land? Was there fear that this attack would be followed by an invasion of the island itself?

H: Yes, they had really thought that there would be an invasion. Before nightfall, all the gun placements were pretty well manned. The barbed wire was up. I would say that by the night of December 7 the island was pretty well secured.

E: What about the attitude towards people of Japanese extraction?

H: We really didn't give it any concern. Those people had been there for years. There were reports of sabotage and so forth, which 99% of them were false. Most of the sabotage was really done by the Caucasians that were employed by the Japanese, or the Germans, or the Italians. I think the Japanese themselves were more American than we were.

E: What about the attitude of the company, was there any feeling that the peace movement hadn't worked in the 1930's? Was there any hysteria in the company, or hotheads that wanted to go over and teach them a lesson?

H: Yes, that was prevalent. Of course, this war was only supposed to last a few months because they were heathens and they didn't know how to fight.

E: What was the average age?

H: Twenty-one, twenty-two. The oldest person in our company when the war started was our first sergeant and he was thirty-two or thirty-three.

E: When you got out here on duty station and went in the reserve status, how long were you out there?

H: Until about the middle of February. Just a little over two months. Our battalion had gone back into Schofield; we were still on reserves. We did field reserves until about the middle of February and then we were drawn back into Schofield post reserve. Those that were on beach position stayed there until the National Guard came over. They relieved us in November. The first of November we left there and we went to Guadalcanal.

- E: What did you do out there for the rest of December, all through the month of January, and part of February? Did you play cards on that beach position?
- H: You worked guard duty, six on and six off.
- E: Why didn't you stay in Schofield and just drive out there for your duty watch?
- H: You had to be there in case something happened. The Army wasn't as glamorous and technical as it is today. They didn't have the equipment where they could see through the night, where they could see through fog. Today you have radar, and infrared. At that time everything was done by hear and see. When I say see, I mean actual optic vision, no computers or anything.
- E: When you were out there for nine months, did you ever get the impression that it was busy work? It certainly didn't take nine weeks to realize that there wasn't going to be an invasion.
- H: No, but you didn't know what was coming. There was always the threat of saboteurs being sent ashore and so forth. There were planes there all of the time, patrols. All these had to be spied.
- E: What about the radar units there, did you ever have any contact with that or know anything about it?
- H: No. We were on what they called OP2, outpost 2; we were up in the mountains. We had to spot planes coming in and going out. We relayed the information to our battalion, which relayed it to regiment, and so on until the identification of the airplane.
- E: The problem we had was no one knew who was in charge. The Army, the Army Air Force, was supposed to have the security from the beach on the island. The Navy was to have offshore patrolling and defense. The end result was that nobody was doing anything. Now some of them are overdoing it.
- H: Through books you get the feeling that there was a lot of confusion, but I, myself, in my own heart can't realize that there was because between the Army and the Navy there was very close contact.
- E: Did you ever have a chance to see how much damage was done in the harbor itself?
- H: From our outpost we could see; it was quite extensive. The second night we were there we could see the burning, and it was beautiful; that sounds odd. Not realizing the damage that



had been done, it was really a sight to behold.

E: What did Schofield barracks look like during the time that you were there?

H: All the barracks at that time were permanent. They were reinforced concrete. Hawaii is volcanic, and they're susceptible to tremors and most of your buildings are prestressed concrete. They were quadrangle type. If you would walk in the front entrance the orderly room was on the right; the steps going up to the next two floors were on the left; the supply room was farther back on the right; the day room was straight ahead; the mess hall was straight ahead on the right. It was very clean, immaculate.

E: What about the cooks, did they serve up food that you were eager to get to three times a day or more if you could?

H: It was palatable. Occasionally they would come up with something that was exceptional, but mostly on Sundays. The other times it was a palatable and balanced diet.

E: What was a typical day like prior to December 7 in the Schofield barracks for you?

H: My day wasn't ordinary because I was going to school most of the time. After my basic training I spent a lot of time in military schools, intelligence communications and so forth. A typical day for a GI at that time was reveille at 5:30, stand to 6:00, breakfast 8:00, 9:00 fall out for close order; this was in the 35th. At 11:45 we went back in and lunch was at 12:00 until 1:00, 1:00 until retreat at 5:00 was what they called care and clean of your equipment; they wanted you to keep your rifle in shape, keep your equipment in shape. Some of them did a little Beetle Bailey work. Some of them spent a little time post rear guarding, and of course with a permanent pass you could go downtown.

E: The character of that Army that you were in, were they individuals that had a lot of "get up and go", and Yankee ingenuity, and took pride in being in the Army, they took care of themselves, they respected their fellow soldiers? By and large, did you feel proud to serve with a bunch of people like that?

H: Yes, because these were all regular Army. Most of these people were in there for thirty years and you had to know how to wear your hat, how to tie your tie, how to have a crease in your pants and your shirt. You had to be able to see yourself in your shoes; that was strictly spit and polish. You couldn't find a prouder group of men.

E: Is there anything else you would like to add about Pearl Harbor before we go on?

H: I don't think so.

E: You went back to Schofield barracks in February of 1942, then where did you go?

H: We were there for a couple of months and then we went out on what they called the east range. It was the first time I had come in contact with an obstacle course. Then we did jungle training through the mountains and so forth. In November we got on the USS President Johnson. The next thing I knew our landing barge was going into Guadalcanal.

E: Were you part of that Marine invasion?

H: No. We went in after the Marines. We went in after the first of December. The Marines went in in August. The Americal Division was the first Army in; they went in in the first of November or the last of October. We were supposed to go to Australia. We backed into a mine and the ship sunk, so we took supplies and they sent us to Guadalcanal.

E: When you got to Guadalcanal were the Japanese still holding up?

H: Yes, they were in the caves and mountains.

Pearl Harbor, Guadalcanal, New Georgia, Bougainville, Korea, Vietnam, those are the most decorated divisions of the United States Army Theatre.

E: Who commanded that division at Guadalcanal?

H: General J. Lawton Collins. After Guadalcanal, we went to New Georgia and we hadn't even got past the beach and I got hit under the arm. I was evacuated to New Hebrides, and down to New Zealand, and back to the States.

E: Did you actually see or use flame throwers in Guadalcanal?

H: No. I don't think there were any at this time.

E: The Marines may have been using them.

H: I didn't see any of those until Korea. The way we went is we used a light tank and they would break through and we would follow them.

E: Did you ever see any of those Seabee's in operation?

H: Yes. They were half Navy and half civilian. I respect the Seabee's; they did a hell of a job of engineering. In the

pacific the Army was the Navy and the Navy was the Army; we were so close.

E: What did Pearl look like when you took a pass and walked out the gate? What would you expect to find?

H: I would have a couple of brews aboard the ship, maybe watch a movie and then I would go back to Schofield.

E: What did the town look like?

H: At Waikiki there was nothing, only four or five hotels. At that time--and it still is--it was the most beautiful piece of real estate in the world.

E: How many times have you been back since you left in 1941?

H: I think it's eight, nine or ten.

END OF INTERVIEW