

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
WILLIAM E. SCHEER  
Radio Repairman, Air Force, World War II  
2001

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**Scheer, William E.**, (1922- ). Oral History Interview, 2001.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 93 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 93 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 93 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

William Scheer, a Madison, Wisconsin native, discusses his stateside World War II service with the 15th and 47th Fighter Squadrons in the Army Air Corps. Scheer talks about joining the Air Corps, assignment to the 15th Fighter Squadron, 15<sup>th</sup> Air Group, which consisted entirely of people from Wisconsin, Illinois, and Michigan, and transfer to Wheeler Field (Hawaii). He describes his duties with the headquarters company at Wheeler Field, where he was a radio repairman, and relationships between officers and enlisted men and older and younger soldiers. Scheer comments on military life in Hawaii including drinking, USO shows, KP duty, and difficulties getting leave time and dates due to scarcity of women. He recalls some veteran soldiers getting busted for setting up a casino in the latrine and encouraging the new guys to gamble. He also mentions the food on base and seeing celebrities like Joe DiMaggio who joined the Armed Forces. Two weeks before the attack on Pearl Harbor, he describes being on class A-1 red alert and not knowing why it was called or dismissed. Scheer discusses the attack on Pearl Harbor including seeing Japanese planes approach and drop bombs. He characterizes taking cover under the headquarters building and says the machine gun tracers “looked like a red snowstorm.” He addresses questions he has about the attack and briefly compares it to the events of the September 11th Terrorist Attack. After Pearl Harbor, he was assigned switchboard duty taking calls from people who believed they saw enemy planes. Scheer talks about how his duties changed after the attack and being transferred to the 47<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron and spending time at Haleiwa Field, Kauai barracks, and Bellows Field. He recalls seeing an airplane land without its landing gear down, and he tells a funny story of watching tugs and people chasing a runaway plane all over the field. Scheer touches upon his reasons for not attempting Officers’ Candidate School. He recalls transferring to Amarillo Air Base (Texas) where he repaired aircraft radios, meeting returnees who cycled through the base, and interacting with civilians. He cites some of his brother's experiences as a member of the 32nd Division in New Guinea. Scheer discusses the family-like atmosphere of the 47th Fighter Squadron and family issues related to military service. He talks about being orphaned in his teens and having trouble finding someone to sign his enlistment papers. Scheer comments on being paid in silver dollars and script, attending unit reunions, and membership in both the VFW and Pearl Harbor Survivors Association.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Scheer (b. July 15, 1922) served in the Army Air Corps for four years. He was at Wheeler field when Pearl Harbor was attacked and most of his service time was in Hawaii. He was honorably discharged in 1945 as a staff sergeant and settled in Waunakee, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2001.

Transcribed by Kathy Jagow, Wisconsin Court Reporter, 2004.

Format corrected by Katy Marty, 2008.

Abstract by Susan Krueger, 2010.

**Transcribed Interview:**

Jim: It's the 17th of December, 2001. Talking to William Scheer. Let me get warmed up. When were you born, Bill?

Bill: July 15, 1922.

Jim: Where?

Bill: Madison.

Jim: And you entered the military service when?

Bill: November 15, 1940.

Jim: Were you drafted?

Bill: No.

Jim: Or did you volunteer?

Bill: I enlisted; I was only 18 years old.

Jim: 11/40. Okay. And where'd you go to boot camp?

Bill: I didn't have any basic training. I went right from here to -- I was sworn in at Milwaukee, we went to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, was there for a week or so, shipped out on the troop train to Fort McDowell on Angel Island in California and shipped out for Hawaii, landed in Hawaii on December 11, 1940.

Jim: You entered military service, and then before the month was out you were in Hawaii?

Bill: I enlisted on the 15th of November, and on the 11th of December I was in Hawaii.

Jim: That's not -- that doesn't leave room for a lot of training, you know that.

Bill: No, no. We were thrown to the wolves right away.

Jim: And that was Army?

Bill: That was Army Air Corps.

Jim: Uh-huh.

- Bill: They had just -- the Army Air Corps had just been made a department of the Army. They had been part of the signal corps prior to that.
- Jim: They must have taught you some specialty of some kind.
- Bill: No. I got over there and we -- we landed, oh, about around eleven o'clock in the morning.
- Jim: Sure.
- Bill: And they put us on that pineapple special, and A through L went to Hickam, M through S went to Wheeler so I went to Wheeler Field. And when we got off the train it was late at night. And how they picked the squadrons of four first sergeants were standing out there, and he dropped his arm and he said, "Everyone from here back to here come with me," and I wound up in headquarters squadron 15<sup>th</sup> fighter. We formed the 15th group when we got over there. And the interesting part about that was that the entire group was made up of people from Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin. And when they went-- wanted a model for the squadron, we said might and wings, but they said, well, this squad -- group isn't going to stay that way. So they said, well, we'll change it to something else because the other guys from other parts of the country would be coming in. And so how I was assigned was a section chief would come through, and he says, "Anybody want to be a mechanic, anybody want to be an armorer?" A guy come through and says, 'Anybody want to be in the radio section?' I said, "Yeah, me." [laughter] I wanted to get into meteorology, but I didn't have enough education for that, I guess. So I wound up in the radio section of headquarters squadron.
- Jim: What'd they teach you?
- Bill: How to change tubes [laughter].
- Jim: How do you sense --
- Bill: Highly restricted. That's what we called ourselves, official knob twisters and official tube changers [laughter]. And I had -- and then they picked some of us for ground defense training so they had some non-coms from Schofield come down from the infantry. And they taught us the basics, you know.
- Jim: Like basic training, how to handle a rifle?
- Bill: How to handle a rifle so I didn't shoot my toe off or shoot somebody else
- Jim: Or somebody else.

Bill: Then they put us out on a two week bivouac, and we lived in pup tents by an old CC camp. It was by the little town they called Wahiawa which is right near Wheeler.

Jim: You were there the whole winter there?

Bill: I was there for four years.

Jim: I mean, out in the pup tents.

Bill: Oh, no, no. We were there just for two weeks.

Jim: Just two weeks.

Bill: Yeah. That was -- well, of course you didn't know whether it was winter, spring, summer or fall, you know, over there.

Jim: That's right. It's just such a wonderful place to be weather-wise, isn't it?

Bill: Yeah. There's -- it's no place for a soldier.

Jim: Did you get in trouble?

Bill: No, it's so boring. You know, there's nothing there, you know. There's nothing there, you know. On Sundays a guy that would have a car would come around and say, anybody want a trip around the island for 25 cents. So he'd take us a trip around the island. Well, one trip --

Jim: Once you've done that.

Bill: Once you've seen everything, of course we used to go around and you can buy a whole bunch of bananas homegrown, you know, for 25 cents, and that's what you'd eat. And that would be about it, you know.

Jim: Really boring.

Bill: It is, yeah. And of course there's no chance of meeting members of the opposite sex. That was completely out because --

Jim: What do you mean out?

Bill: Well, because --

Jim: You're at liberty.

Bill: Yeah, but the ratio between women to men was about 350 men to every woman over there so, see, so they were picking and choosing. And an ugly guy like me didn't have a chance [laughter]. And of course you only got to town maybe once every 10 days, if that often. So I mean, you found out -- we made our own within our own group. Of course, I was only 18.

Jim: Sure.

Bill: When they had the beer call.

Jim: That's what I was going to say. You weren't allowed to drink.

Bill: No, no, no, no. Nothing.

Jim: Didn't bend that rule?

Bill: No, no. Even on base you couldn't do that.

Jim: The PF's, you mean.

Bill: Yeah. If they had even -- well, later on after the war broke out they had beer call, you know. If you weren't of age, you couldn't have one until --

Jim: They checked your ID.

Bill: Well, I guess they knew pretty well who you were. I mean, oh, you could sneak one. There's no question about that.

Jim: Sure.

Bill: But the only thing is it's like everything else, it's fine but just don't get caught.

Jim: Exactly [laughter].

Bill: And of course when I went in first there was a tremendous caste system in the military, you know, an officer, they were God, you know. And of course just a simple little farm boy from down here in Oregon, they scared me.

Jim: You rarely caught sight of them.

Bill: They scared the hell out of me.

Jim: Sure.

Bill: I did everything but genuflect when they'd come by.

- Jim: Yeah, but you were in the headquarters company squadron.
- Bill: Yeah.
- Jim: You probably saw a lot of them.
- Bill: Yeah. Yeah. Well, see, I was in the CC camp before I went into the Army. I was out here at Camp Madison for four months and so they only give me \$8.00 a month so the other \$30 a month-- I got \$22 worth was put up in a bank up in Sparta for me. Well, so then they notified me that I had, I don't know, something like \$90 coming. And my squadron commander at that time was just a first lieutenant, I mean, there weren't a lot of even pilots in at that time.
- Jim: Sure.
- Bill: So he got -- they sent it to him, and he called me into the orderly room and I sat there, I was scared to death again. And he says, you take this up to the Schofield Bank and you deposit it, and I want to see that deposit slip when you get back. So I did, and I brought it back because -- well, the first pay day we had over there, a bunch of these old soldiers and the old sergeants that were there, they set up almost a casino in our latrine.
- Jim: Take your money away.
- Bill: Yeah [laughter]. And Lieutenant Hubbard saw this and he come through and he threw the whole bunch of them out.
- Jim: Stick it to the young guys.
- Bill: Oh yeah, they'd take our money. A lot of the guys -- and they didn't know anything about it. Poor guy, he was a pretty good guy. And he took a rookie pilot up in an AT-6 one night. I remember I was working that night and I checked him out on the radio, and they never come back.
- Jim: You never did find him?
- Bill: They don't know what happened to him. They went down at sea.
- Jim: Probably engine trouble over the water?
- Bill: Could be most anything, and we never did see. And he was a real nice guy. I remember him.
- Jim: That's a shame.



- Bill: Yeah, it was. That was a crime, it was a crime. And a lot of those officers were pretty good officers.
- Jim: Well, they're all regular so--
- Bill: Yeah. And see, in headquarters squadron that was what they did. They brought pilots from out of Randolph Field or Kelly Field, and they put them in single-seat fighters, see, because the most thing they'd flown was probably BT-12 or BT-14 was slower and --
- Jim: Sure.
- Bill: And dual seats, you know. I mean, front and back so they were always up in training planes, right. So then they brought them over and all we had at that time, all the whole base had was just P-36s.
- Jim: The old P-36.
- Bill: That was a forerunner to that and P-26s.
- Jim: Same picture.
- Bill: Well, we had a couple of them. And as a matter of fact, that's all we had left after the blitz was just the P-26s. And so --
- Jim: That wasn't much.
- Bill: No. And then just that, well, it would be kind of the summer/fall of '41 we got P-40s. They started coming in and we got the P-40 Bs and that's what we did; we checked them out.
- Jim: That was -- what was your specific duty there, Bill?
- Bill: Well, I was -- it was called communications. I worked on radios in planes.
- Jim: Repair or somewhat.
- Bill: Yeah. You repair them, and of course you would be changing frequency all the time and you had to tune them, and there would be frayed cords. And then you brought them in for -- after so many hours you brought them in and checked the tubes and cleaned them all up and put them back in the planes. And then of course you were -- back then we had wire antennas. It went from wing tip to tail to wing tip. And of course up there in some of those dives and so forth they would break off.
- Jim: I was gonna say, so they had to be checked.

- Bill: And so we'd have to replace them. And then of course --
- Jim: How were they fastened to the wing?
- Bill: Well, at first of all they had an insulator where it was kind of like this with a hole on both ends, see. And then one would go to an anchor on the wing tip, see. And then the other would be on here, and we'd fasten the wire in there. Then we would wrap it and solder it, see, and then we'd go back to the tail. It would just go through an insulated or on the tail, it would just pass through there and then out to the other wing. And then the down lead going off the antenna would have to -- we'd have to put a wrap on there and that was soldered and then down to an insulated knob on the side of the fuselage and into the radio, see. And all they found out that that soldering, that's why they were breaking because it was always brittle from the heat. It would --
- Jim: Changes in temperature.
- Bill: The change, the temper of the metal. And so then we came and they devised a wire tie, a wire wrap. And that was -- that worked out a lot better both there and on the down lead both. And then of course we had to maintain the telephone system within the squadron with the W-88 telephones, you know, these old things in the leather bags. We had to string wire and hook those up and also had a switchboard. And so prior to the raid on December 7th, we'd been on a -- we were on an alert for -- we called it a class A-1 red alert.
- Jim: Practice?
- Bill: No, no. This was a real alert. And of course a lot of people referred to maneuvers or war games or whatever you want, but this is pretty serious because I was on guard duty during that part of that time, and we were walking guard with one in the chamber of the gun on safety and fixed bayonets.
- Jim: What month in '41 was this?
- Bill: This -- we were called off on the 5th of December.
- Jim: So at this time right before the attack?
- Bill: That was two weeks before the attack. And so my squadron was living in tents between -- right on the hangar line between two hangars. And I had been taken out of there and moved up to the group communications tent because we had a group radio and a group switchboard, and there was two of us quartered there for 24 hour maintenance.
- Jim: Sure.

- Bill: And the radio men were from Cudahy, Wisconsin, his name was John Aiello, he's deceased now, God love him. And then I had the group switchboard, so I was there and operated that.
- Jim: Now was your time off restricted then too, stay on the base?
- Bill: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. As a matter of fact, when we first went on that alert, our assistant line chief was caught off base, and he had a hell of a time getting back on base. As a matter of fact, they had to get the squadron commander down there to verify him.
- Jim: What was the reason they gave you for all this going on?
- Bill: Well, we were kind of used to it, you know. I mean, we had games with the Navy. The Navy'd be up buzzing around and the Marines and all of that.
- Jim: Just another practice exercise.
- Bill: Right. And they'd be flying around giving the guys something besides fighting or dog fighting with one another. They'd get a Navy pilot or a Marine pilot. And it also helped us because we'd dispersed all the planes all around the field, and then with your guard duty and everything else, it changes things a little bit. And it changes the roster. But no, you couldn't go on pass. You were restricted to base. That's all.
- Jim: And the mail was on a regular basis.
- Bill: Oh, yeah. There was no shortage.
- Jim: You wrote the folks and they wrote you.
- Bill: Well, I didn't have any folks, but whoever was back there. My brother of course was in at that time.
- Jim: Your folks were gone?
- Bill: I was orphaned at 14.
- Jim: Oh, my.
- Bill: As a matter of fact, that's an interesting thing, too. When I enlisted, Captain Bollenbeck was the recruiting officer here. He got out and says, now we got to get somebody to sign your enlistment papers. And I said, well, my brother, he's 22. He says, is he your guardian? I said, no, I don't have no guardian. So he called over to the Dane County courthouse to a judge friend of his, and the judge

appointed him my temporary guardian and signed my enlistment papers [laughter]. So -- but I had my sister was back here and my brother was -- he was drafted into the 32nds.

Jim: So those were the people you wrote to.

Bill: Yeah. And some friends down in high school, a high school friend down in Oregon.

Jim: Was any entertainment provided to you guys? I know USO hadn't been developed by then.

Bill: No. No no, no, no.

Jim: There was nothing?

Bill: There was nothing like that, no.

Jim: But not until after the war started?

Bill: Right.

Jim: So you never saw the any of those?

Bill: I did see one show after the war started. I saw Jack Benny when he came through Hawaii. They had what they call kind of a little rest camp, in other words, we could go down there and you could get a room for a buck a night. Well, no different than your barracks, but of course you weren't restricted or anything.

Jim: Sure.

Bill: It was just a cot, and that's all you needed so that was pretty nice. That was called Mahalia, and that's when Jack Benny and Carol Anderson and all them come over and I saw them.

Jim: Sure.

Bill: The greatest show I ever saw though was just two people. Ray Bolger and Little Jack Little, and they put on a two hour show in Mahalia that was fantastic. Ray Bolger was soakin' wet from dancin' and Little Jack Little on the piano, he was fantastic. Of course, I'd never seen anything like that.

Jim: Sure.

Bill: But that was really good.

- Jim: I'll bet that was.
- Bill: But I think the biggest thrill to me was we were stationed on Koai, and I came back with another friend of mine to field wire school at Hickam Field, and we used the base mess hall there. And I went to chow at noon, and I come out of the chow hall and I'm alone and walkin' down the street, and this other soldier came walkin' toward me, he was the same as I was, a staff sergeant. It was Joe DiMaggio.
- Jim: Who was that?
- Bill: Joe DiMaggio.
- Jim: Oh.
- Bill: And that was really something. See, they had a lot of ball players over there at that time. And yeah, it was -- and then you run across things. And Joe Kronin stopped, we were quartered in the high school, it was right near Haleiwa because all our tents were burned out for squadron area so we were cordoned in Haleiwa school and he came up there to see us, and he was out on the front porch.
- Jim: That was nice.
- Bill: And he visited with us -- oh, yeah, that was real nice, but that was about as close as I ever come to any of those big shows or anything.
- Jim: Okay. And you had a chow hall, did you?
- Bill: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. As a matter of fact, when I was transferred out of headquarters squadron into 47th group our mess sergeant was right from here in Madison. His name was Harlan Padway. I don't know -- maybe you got him on tape somewhere. And then our chow at the -- before the war we had a group mess hall. And our mess sergeant there was then a chef in some big hotel in New York. And he put out good chow, I'll tell you. And boy, when you did KP under him, I'll tell ya, boy, you better have everything perfect. He never took a chance on anything. He'd find one plate with a little grease on it and you'd done the whole works all over again.
- Jim: Oh, my, my, my.
- Bill: Oh yeah. I mean, he was so afraid -- I mean you didn't know you get dysentery in an outfit like that and you got a problem.
- Jim: And that would end up being his fault.

- Bill: Oh yeah, right, right. Right. Right. I'll never forget, I was on KP and just before I left the cook says, here, wash this jar. It was these gallon jelly jars, you know, about that big. So I washed it and we cleaned up the kitchen and mopped the floor. And I sliced my hand right there. It broke in the sink and I turned around and hold my hand like this, I didn't want no blood to drop on the floor [laughter]. So I ran out and let it go.
- Jim: Probably beyond the call of duty.
- Bill: Oh yeah.
- Jim: That's good. So tell me about the day.
- Bill: Well, like I said, I was stationed up there at that group communications as a group switchboard operator. And I got up --
- Jim: You were inside this time, you're not in a tent.
- Bill: No. We was in the tent.
- Jim: Okay.
- Bill: It was a communication tent. And it was divided off the back end, was room for two bunks back there, and that's where Johnny and I slept. And I was going to -- I got up to go to mass, eight o'clock mass, and as a matter of fact, I was going to mass and go to chow and then I was gonna meet a buddy of mine, and we were goin' down to Pearl Harbor to meet a friend of his from Chicago on the Arizona. And that's the truth. And so anyway, I went into the -- we used the latrine in group headquarters. His tent was right behind the group headquarters and cleaned up and come back out and was puttin' my stuff away and Johnny says, "What's that noise?" I said, "I don't know, machine guns, I guess. Schofield is out on the machine gun range this morning." You see, we just been on the alert so that didn't shock us any.
- Jim: Sure.
- Bill: So he got up and walked to the door of the tent, and the tents were up here and the field was below us. He was -- we was kind of elevated and so we could look out over the field, look out across the fields. And of course Wheeler Field is right at the base of the Waianae Range.
- Jim: Oh.
- Bill: And they came through Kolikoli Pass, it was just above Schofield and then we looked and in the shadow of the Waianae Range we could see these fighters heading south down toward Pearl. And then they were charging their guns and

checking their cellunoids and so forth. And we watched them and says, "There's planes over there." And then just then we heard a flight above us, maybe around eight, 10,000 feet and we looked and we saw 'em peel off and come down. And as they were in their dive, I didn't pay any attention to it because the planes that they resembled -- the silhouette resembled a lot of what the Marines used, the dauntless dive bomber. And they came down and he came down about a thousand feet, he pulled out and we saw the bomb fall and we saw the red circle. And that bomb hit way down on an end of the field at the Waianae air depot. See, they had civilians that come up there and do all the real technical work on the engines and everything else. And it hit a used oil storage tank. And we saw it, it just went up in the air, and he looked at me and I looked at him and I says, "It's the Japs." So he said, "Well, let's get out of here." And we started for the open field and I said, "No, we ain't better go that way, we'll have to go right through the motor pool with all those trucks parked out there. I mean, they'll be shootin' for them."

Jim: An obvious target.

Bill: Right. So I says, "What we do?" I said, "What do we do? Let's crawl under group headquarters, that should be enough protection." And so we laid under there. And of course the bombs kept comin' and fallin'. And then you could look out and they were usin', I think a -- every five to fifth round was a tracer. And it looked like --

Jim: It was a machine gun?

Bill: It was machine gun they were shootin'. Every fifth round was a tracer and it looked like a red snowstorm. Then across the road from us, the building we were across the street from us was a radio relay station. It had a bunch of antennas, and they were tryin' to get that, but they couldn't get the right angle because of the buildings and the trees around it and the trees around it, they couldn't come in.

Jim: Sharp enough.

Bill: And if they come in high enough they'd never be able to pull out. And then so we could hear the bullets hittin' the curb and plink, plink, plink, you know.

Jim: How long did this go on?

Bill: You know, the time with something like that you lose all sense of time, you know. Like I said, I got up for breakfast and we went through all this, and the next thing I knew it was in the middle of the afternoon and I hadn't had anything to eat. And then the word kind of filtered down that they -- because our mess hall was all --

Jim: Shattered.

Bill: Scobbled up so they had these lean-to's, kind of as a parkin' lot up above, well, post headquarters there where people parked their car, I don't know why, in case it might rain, hardly ever did. But anyway, they set up temporary kitchens there and we were able to go up and get a couple sandwiches. And then after that I was assigned to fighter control in post headquarters and as a switchboard operator. And we'd take calls from people who could see this, well, for instance, one night we got a call that somethin' shiny in the hole way high up, they figured it'd be up around 28,000 feet way up in the air. And so we scrambled a flight, and then I can remember, I knew the officer, the lieutenant. He later became my squadron commander when I was at the 47th. And he radioed the guys at 29,000 feet there was an unidentified object or whatever it was. So I could still hear the flight leader say, okay, boys, put on the oxygen, here we go again [laughter]. So they got up there and he radioed back and he says, lieutenant, he says, there ain't nothing up here but a beautiful silver moon [laughter].

Jim: That's all.

Bill: And the lieutenant says, come on back. And there used to be a lot of that, you know. Still there's a lot of questions, I still don't know to this day and nobody ever explained who called us off of that alert on the fifth. Because we were told class A-1 red alert, only it was ordered by Washington and only be called off by Washington. But there's never been any -- everything I've read there's never been anything said about that or why. And another thing that I don't buy is that General Short ordered all our planes in to be parked wing-tipped at wing-tipped because it would be easier to guard against --

Jim: That's a standard setting.

Bill: Because it would be easier to guard against sabotage, and that's foolish. I can't buy that because, first of all, General Short was an old infantry officer from World War I. And the first thing, you know, even I learned that without basic training is you don't bunch up. And it would also be easier to sabotage. And if that's --

Jim: That would be -- take the bunch out.

Bill: And if that was the case then why after the war started that would be more risk of sabotage than before, why didn't we disperse them then. So I can't -- I don't know, with all the Japanese on the island it would be so easy to slip through headquarters. I just have -- this is mine only, I have nothing official to go on.

Jim: Sounds good.

Bill: I just can't buy that an old infantry officer would put everything in a little spot like this. Well, look what happened in the World Trade Center. You know, that's what can happen. And that's why I just can't buy that. I just can't.



- Jim: What the purpose is of that.
- Bill: Yeah. Yeah. You know, it's just like who called off the alert. Nobody knows. It's never been answered. Why couldn't, you know -- the espionage of the Japanese over there was amazing, you know. Even before, you know. They had people all over the place.
- Jim: I know. They had no trouble getting whoever they had to on the in.
- Bill: And the population of the Japanese and the Hawaiian Islands at that time, hell, they could be working in any office or right next to somebody.
- Jim: There was so many of them?
- Bill: Yeah, right, right. Right. And it was large. And so that's why I say that stuff just don't add up to me. But I mean, of course everybody wants to go all the way up and blame it onto Roosevelt. Well, first of all, this thing wasn't planned overnight. If you read some of the books by an author by the name of Tolan who is -- he wrote, I think it's *The Rise and Fall of the Rising Sun*.
- Jim: Yeah, Tom Tolan. I've read his book.
- Bill: Yeah. And where he said, the Japanese had to develop a shallow water torpedo, otherwise they'd have lost it in the mud of Pearl Harbor. And they started that a year-and-a-half before the attack. And they were practicing. And so how can -- this just didn't happen overnight. And I don't think Roosevelt -- they said well, he wanted it. No, he didn't. Because he just signed a lend-lease agreement with England.
- Jim: Right.
- Bill: And why would he want to split, -- right, right. And split our --
- Jim: No, I think the law decided the attack was going to be in the Sumatra and all the places down there.
- Bill: Well, see, that's the thing, doctor. I mean, the whole -- the reason the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor is they had this huge war machine. And what people don't realize, Japanese is an island nation. And they don't have -- well, they have natural resources, but not that much. And the closest place and the best place for them to get it was Borneo and New Guinea, the Dutch East Indies. But they weren't gonna negotiate, they were gonna take it. And the biggest thorn in their side by our fleet at Pearl Harbor and our installations in the Philippines so they were gonna knock out the fleet at Pearl Harbor. And another thing is they say is, well, why did the warnings -- people don't realize communications back then

were far, far, far from what they are today.

Jim: Not as sophisticated.

Bill: Everything was telegraph, you know. And I don't think that there was any trans-oceanic cables from the United States to Hawaii, everything was radio telephone, if you could hear anybody. And then coming from Washington clear out there, see, there's -- it was just the Japanese's fault. It was nobody else. I don't care who you want to blame. It goes right back to them [laughter].

Jim: Of course.

Bill: As far as I'm concerned. And of course we not knowing where their fleet was, well, that was tough to decipher.

Jim: That was the middle [unintelligible].

Bill: Right, right, right. But then of course, well, it's just like September 11th. Who expected somebody to just come in like that without -- I mean, you figure everybody would at least have the diplomacy to declare war before, even if it was an hour before they hit you. And then everybody says, well, couldn't you pick those planes up on radar. Well, radar was very --

Jim: But that they were waiting for the B-17s to come in.

Bill: But not only that, doctor, but radar back then was in its infancy.

Jim: With a shaky start.

Bill: Right. And how many people knew how to read it even or understood. We had a radio site and you said they picked up those planes, but they thought the B-17s coming in from the States --

Jim: Had to be --

Bill: That's what they thought that was.

Jim: That was the unfortunate coincidence.

Bill: Right.

Jim: Even though by that time it wouldn't have made a pot of difference.

Bill: No, no.

Jim: I mean, they were upon us.

Bill: See, and that's why I say somebody in there had to get us off of that alert because if we hadn't have been, we'd have had dawn patrols out because we did all the way through there. We had dawn patrols out every morning.

Jim: How far out?

Bill: Well, they'd go out quite a ways.

Jim: 200, 300 miles?

Bill: Oh, yeah. They'd go out without the range of the P-40s and come back. And not only that, we'd have PBYs up, and they go out a long ways. And see, we had them stationed at Kauai, and they got hit pretty hard too about the same time we did.

Jim: Now, Wheeler and Talafax, Schofield?

Bill: Schofield Barracks, yeah.

Jim: Were they hit as hard as you were?

Bill: No, they got hit as hard as Wheeler, no. They got mostly machine gun strafing up there and soldiers running around. I don't know that it --

Jim: They didn't get bombs dropped.

Bill: Not that I know. I don't think they did.

Jim: I interviewed one guy or two guys, I guess. And then seven guys were, the only thing I hadn't heard was somebody who was on the Arizona. Did you hear anybody?

Bill: No, I don't know anybody on the Arizona.

Jim: Everybody around here was at Pearl Harbor and knows everybody else, but they didn't know anybody.

Bill: No. I never even asked this friend of mine who's in Sacramento. As a matter of fact, we went and took a trip out-- well, as a matter of fact, September 11th we were stranded in Minneapolis. We were going out west [laughter]. Anyway, we drove out, and I stopped and saw this buddy of mine in Sacramento, and that's the boy that was gonna meet this guy from Chicago on the Arizona. And I've never asked him what happened to that, that person he was gonna meet. I don't know whether he made it or whether he didn't. I have no idea.

- Jim: Well, it's -- I was kind of hoping that you knew somebody here that was on the Arizona.
- Bill: No, I don't. Unfortunate or fortunate, I don't. I didn't know anybody. I had been just a month or two before that I had went down to Pearl Harbor with a buddy of mine from Blanchardville, a kid by the name of Victors, he had a friend from Blanchardville that was on the Honolulu; that's the only time. And then another time I went down there to find a Marine that I went to school with, but they found what ship he was on, but they were cadreing up to go down under, but they didn't know exactly where the ship was in the harbor. And then the only other person from home that I met was I was sittin' in the parachute shack one day and a soldier comes down and he wanted to know is Corporal Scheer here. And I said, "Yeah." "The major wants to see you." "Major? I don't know any major." I went up and here it was from Oregon, a Major Hurley Olson, and so he's -- as a matter of fact, he used to come down to -- we had the theater in the schoolhouse and we used to show movies, and he used to come down to that. And I used to see him every once in awhile; that's about the only one I ever ran into from home. Of course I was with some guys from home in my radio section. It was Ray Straeber who's passed away. As a matter of fact, we were in the same radio section. We worked together, we were in the same shack. We were in eight pen shacks at that time. When we moved to -- see, when I left Wheeler I went to Haleiwa and from there we went over to Kauai barracks, and then we came back to Mokolai and I came home from Bellows Field.
- Jim: Right. After the attack nobody was allowed to call home.
- Bill: No, no.
- Jim: That was all shut down, right?
- Bill: Yeah.
- Jim: For two weeks, was it?
- Bill: Yeah, something like that. It was quite a while.
- Jim: Somebody told me --
- Bill: Of course, I don't know -- I don't think there was any way you could call home anyway, but you could -- and of course we were told -- oh, we were told we could send telegrams, but I guess --
- Jim: Saying you're okay.
- Bill: But I guess none of them even got each through -- but I guess none of them even got through from what I wrote. I asked if anybody got any, and nobody said

they got anything. I sent several of them, but I never --

Jim: How did your life change now after that morning, was it -- did your duties change?

Bill: Well, duties stayed -- like I said, duties changed pretty much. The only thing that happened after that was I left headquarters squadron because they took our airplanes away from us, see, so we didn't train pilots any more. They were sent out of the tactical squadrons. So see, the 50th group was made up of headquarters, 45th, 46th and and 47th. And I was transferred to the 47th fighter squadron.

Jim: Transferred, when was that, in March of '42?

Bill: No, it was in '43.

Jim: Oh. A whole year went by.

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: In 1943 you transferred to what kind of a squadron?

Bill: 47th fighter squadron.

Jim: 47th?

Bill: Yeah. And then I stayed -- there my duties were pretty much the same. Only thing there it was more -- I still played around with the planes and radios, but most of mine was mostly the wire communications, the telephones because we moved quite a bit and we would have to set up.

Jim: Where was that 47<sup>th</sup> squadron?

Bill: When I went to them they were at Haleiwa Field.

Jim: That's on Oahu?

Bill: That's on Oahu. See, that's the squadron that when they were in Haleiwa, and they were on gunnery. And they were the only squadron that had guns in their planes, you see, because when they went on gunnery they'd put 'em at a remote field like that so that they'd be away from the populated -- away from the populated areas and somebody didn't get shot or guns go off or so forth. And that's where Welch and Taylor jumped in their cars at Wheeler Field and drove to Haleiwa. And they got up from there and their planes out of the 47th. And so when I was transferred to them at Haleiwa.

Jim: They had P-40s.

Bill: They had P-40s.

Jim: Okay.

Bill: And until I was transferred there and then I was there, I don't know how long, then we went to -- we moved from there we went to Kauai.

Jim: Kauai?

Bill: Barking Sands, air base at Barking Sands. And we were there probably approximately a year.

Jim: Was your duties the same?

Bill: Same, yeah. Pretty much. Radio and so forth.

Jim: Even less to do on that island than there was on Oahu.

Bill: Well, we were given a little more because there was no tower there or anything and we had to have -- we had a mobile tower, and we had a mobile radio. We sat out there and we talked. I remember one time we were out there and a plane was comin' in, a P-40 was comin' from from another squadron and didn't have its gear down. And we hollered at him. I shot the biscuit gun at him which shoots a light, you know, the red light and go around. He come in there just sittin' there, just set that thing -- and he had a belly tank on there, see, and he set it right down on that belly tank and it skidded along and never got a wind clip, it didn't tip. It flattened that belly tank out, and all of a sudden a little fire started comin' out. And I don't know whether I can say this on but he says we had a radio man from down in Texas, he was a good kid, he was funnier than hell [laughter]. He says, I usually don't swear at officers and that, but I hollered, "You son of a bitch, get out of there." [Laughter]. And he sat in that plane just writin' out his form, he didn't even know there was a fire or nothin'. Finally he got on out there and they unstrapped him and got him out, but the guys were out there with the foam and put it out right away.

Jim: Pretty lucky.

Bill: Yeah, oh yeah. It could have exploded, you know. And of course the guy -- the funny thing -- I don't know if you call it funny, but we had -- this is when we went to the P-47. This was later, we were at the Bellows, yeah, at Bellows Field. And these two pilots --

Jim: Where is that?

Bill: Bellows Field is on Oahu.

Jim: Oahu, back to Oahu?

Bill: Yeah. We came back to Mokolai and then we moved down to Oahu, or down to Bellows. And they were comin' in in formation. They were landing.

Jim: P-47s?

Bill: P-47s, in twos. And this guy was here and this guy come in. And this guy, he started coming in and this guy was chewin' this guy's wing.

Jim: Jesus.

Bill: So he jumped out of the plane, still at landing. We were still goin' about 80 miles an hour. The only thing that saved him when he lit, he lit on his parachute, and that plane kept on goin' and it had that wing hanging down, and that engine [laughter] --

Jim: Like surfing.

Bill: And all the guys out there in the tugs trying to chase it down. Looked like a wounded animal goin' around and around. And yeah [laughter]. Every time that they'd get off the runway to hit it a little, the engine would speed up and then it would swing around and finally --

Jim: All by itself.

Bill: All by itself, just swingin' and whirlin'.

Jim: What made it quit, I wonder.

Bill: It finally did, it went into the -- the rescue shack and it sounded just like a big saw goin' in to wood, eeyow. It just chopped that up. Yeah, that's a 2800 Pratt & Whitney engine on the front of that thing [laughter]. But the way that thing would go around and around and around and around.

Jim: Everybody chasin' it.

Bill: Everybody chasin' it in tugs. Guys would get there and just about get on it and it would turn, and it turned right around on them. And they'd have to get out of the way [laughter]. Boy, I wish somebody would have got a picture of that, that was funny. Guys were sittin' on the roofs of buildings and everything watching. That was our entertainment.

Jim: That's a lot.

Bill: Yeah. And that poor pilot that jumped out, he wound up in the hospital and he -- there at Bellows we had in our shacks and the officer's shacks, and then where we were quartered we were right next to the officers. And of course those guys used to come down and bat the breeze with us a lot.

Jim: Sure.

Bill: Well, one thing we'd always do is we'd go to the mess hall and get ourselves a block of ice, you know, a big rush and go to the PX and get a case of beer and we'd have our own fun in the barracks. And those guys would come down and sit and chat with us. And this pilot, he used to come down and visit with us a lot. Because there were mostly second lieutenants and of course --

Jim: Sure; still youngsters up there.

Bill: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. That was pretty near every night we'd have to go get a case of beer. That was our entertainment.

Jim: That was a lot.

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: You stayed there?

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: A long time.

Bill: For four years.

Jim: Four years and never left the islands?

Bill: No.

Jim: Interesting. Most guys moved out?

Bill: Yeah. A lot of guys -- well, that was partly my own fault, but I never felt I was qualified. Guys did anything to get back. First of all, I couldn't qualify for cadet training, flying, because of my eyesight.

Jim: Um-hum.

Bill: And a lot of guys applied for OCS, and I never did. I just didn't figure I'd qualify for it. I figured you had to be smart. But that's the way they came back. Some guys -- they were looking for guys to go to tank school, armor school and, well, I liked the air corps and I didn't want to get into any of those other outfits.



Jim: Yeah. They'd shoot at ya.

Bill: Yeah. [laughter] Yeah; yeah, right.

Jim: Easy decision.

Bill: Yeah. Right. I felt I was bad enough looking up and seeing that rear gunner of that Jap plane was staring over that machine gun at me, I could count his teeth almost. No, I-- but I don't know. It was just -- I liked being around airplanes. I always have. And I enjoyed that part of it. And then I came back and, well -- I was there almost four years to the day. I got there the 11th of December in '40 and I came home the 5th of December, '45 -- '44. And no, I never left the island. And as a matter of fact, I got a 21 day delay en route which wasn't counted as leave time because I had to report to Santa Ana Air Base on January 1st for reassignment. And then they reassigned me to the paradise of the world, Amarillo, Texas.

Jim: Right, about the same.

Bill: Oh, God.

Jim: What a shock; that's a cultural shock going from Hawaii to Amarillo, Texas.

Bill: Yeah, right. Oh, Lord. That was really -- I never forget. Got off the train, another GI and I and an elderly lady and she says, well, soldier boys, this is Amarillo, Texas. There's only two things between here and the North Pole, and that's two barbwire fences and one of them's blown down. Oh, I'd never seen --

Jim: When did you get to Amarillo?

Bill: January.

Jim: January of '46?

Bill: January of '46, yeah.

Jim: Why weren't you getting out?

Bill: January of '45 I got there.

Jim: Oh.

Bill: Yeah. See, I came home in '44, it would be January of '45.

Jim: And you weren't there the entire war?

Bill: Oh no, no, no, no.

Jim: Change that. Till January '45.

Bill: Um-hum.

Jim: To Texas?

Bill: Yes, Amarillo; Amarillo air base.

Jim: Texas air base.

Bill: Um-hum.

Jim: And did you -- did your work change?

Bill: Well, somewhat. I wound up in a communications -- I sat around for a long time and I'd go up to the orderly room and I'd say, "Well, sergeant, where do I go Today?" See, they were supposed to give me a leave when I got assigned. And they says, "Well, you just had a leave." I said, "No, I didn't, I had a delay en route." "Now you can't have it." So I'd come in, he said, "Why don't you go to town on a pass." "I ain't got nothin' to go to town, I don't want to go to town on a pass." They finally got me in communications there, and then I was put on an alert crew and I kind of liked that because we took --

Jim: What was your job then specifically?

Bill: Radio. In radio.

Jim: Radio repair?

Bill: Radio repair, and I worked on transit aircraft, the planes flying through going west or going east, and I got to work on all different type of aircraft.

Jim: Um-hum.

Bill: And then of course I met a lot of guys, I met two guys from the old 78th squadron that were at Wheeler Field, and they were both in the communications section. And it was interesting because there was a lot of -- we called them guys that had gang plank fever, they'd never been out of the States. And of course, oh, what a bunch of -- I shouldn't say it, I suppose, they were all right. But -- and of course we all came back with stripes, you know.

Jim: Sure. You must have been a tech sergeant.

Bill: I was a staff.

Jim: Staff sergeant.

Bill: Yeah. And we had staff and techs.

Jim: Sure.

Bill: And of course most of these guys were slick sleeves. And boy, they were really getting -- and of course our old buddy in Washington, Hap Arnold says, no returnee will be busted without a general court martial. Nobody. And then my buddy that I ran into over there, he was a private and he'd been in the CBI, China, Burma, India Theater, and he came back and they threw him on KP. And he was over there workin' KP duty, and he wouldn't say anything. All of a sudden, I think it was the MPs came in, they asked him, "Is your name Beier?" He says, "Yeah." They said, "You're off of KP." Arno put out an order that no returnee would be put on KP and so [laughter]-- so then there was -- and I was scared when I walked in there because I'd see all these guys working. And of course they had a civilian group there that did the real repair on radios.

Jim: Sure. **[End of Side 1, tape A]**

Bill: And everything. But then we had gone to very high frequency sets, this VHF that they called, and we got in there and they brought in a couple of them on alert crew. And the guy was standing there, and he says, "Do you know how to do these?" And I said, "Yeah." And they didn't even know how to do, you know, a V-8 set. So I felt pretty good then.

Jim: Sure.

Bill: I didn't have to worry about all of their fancy talk and all of their fancy equipment. So it was a little different around there and than it had ever been. But fortunately there was a lot of returnees. I mean, one of the guys in my barracks as a matter of fact slept right below me. He had flown a hundred missions over Germany from the 8th Air Force.

Jim: As a gunner?

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: Or a radio man.

Bill: A gunner, he was a gunner. I don't know what he was doing, where he worked over there. I think they just put him somewhere when not give him many duties in respect for -- see, what happened is after we were there awhile, they made that a B-29 engineering base. We had a bunch of engineering cadets around there.

Jim: Oh, I see.

Bill: And of course you had some of these officers that thought all these old pineapples and so forth were like the cadets and they tried some of their baloney orders on us [laughter]. Some of it worked and some of it didn't.

Jim: Like chicken shit is everywhere.

Bill: Oh, yeah. It was different, I'll tell you. I don't know. I just couldn't get -- like you know in the squadron you were almost like family, you know.

Jim: Sure.

Bill: And everything over there was just different. And of course you had a lot of people that then—a lot of the guys were married and they were living off base.

Jim: But you were still single.

Bill: Yeah, oh yeah. Yeah. And thank goodness [laughter].

Jim: Thank goodness?

Bill: Right.

Jim: Why?

Bill: I didn't have chick nor child. I didn't have anything like that to worry about.

Jim: That's right. And that wasn't a place to take a bride anyway.

Bill: No. You were foot-loose and fancy-free.

Jim: Sure.

Bill: And I'd have often said if I'd have stayed in the Army I don't think I'd ever married or had a family because that would --

Jim: Too many inconveniences.

Bill: That would be no place. I still don't think it's a place to raise a family. I have a son that put 20 years in the Navy and he had a family, and he just fortified my belief there, but he did a good job. He had – he did a heck of a good job.

Jim: You have to give up a lot.

Bill: But he was gone so long. Well, the kids have to give up a lot too, you know. He's not there for this or that and the other thing and then the programs and he managed to be -- he was pretty well based at Whitby Island in Washington. He was -- he's an aerial aviation ordnance man. So he never knew when he'd have to go out. And when he'd go out he'd go the four, six months at a time. So it -- but he got his college education out of it so I have to give him credit for that.

Jim: It's a tough life.

Bill: Yes, it is. It's tough, I think it's tougher for the family, though, I really do. And I don't think I'd ever have wanted that. No, I'm kind of glad it was the way I did. I didn't have nothin' to worry about on that score. As a matter of fact, down at Amarillo, going to town was nothin'. So we had a real good NCO club there so that's where we used to go. We'd have a good time up there, and you were with your own -- you swapped lies and dug trenches and fox holes.

Jim: Sure.

Bill: And most of it was returnees that came back. I met some nice people down there.

Jim: You were keeping track --Do you still keep in touch with any of those folks?

Bill: Oh, yeah. Oh sure, yeah. Like I said, the guy in Sacramento, I got to see him. And then I used to -- we started the 47th squadron, we started a reunion here in Madison in 1961 and we had it every two years in different places throughout the country up until 1999, we had the last one here. Then the guys decided that that would be the last one. Nobody wanted to take the next one. And the guys are all -- see, I'm the baby and I'm 79. And everybody now is well in their '80s.

Jim: Too much trouble to travel.

Bill: You don't want to drive. They'd love to go but they don't want -- but nobody wants to take on the responsibility to have it.

Jim: Producing it.

Bill: Right. I'd have had it, too. It isn't that bad, but nobody wants to come, they don't want to travel. And so I kept in contact with them. And like I said, it was Ray Stroeber here in Madison. He and I were always friends up until he passed away. Dick Clements has passed away, Harlan Padley has passed away. They were all in my outfit when I was over there. And then, well, we were having that reunion, the one in '99, I put an ad in the VFW magazine and had my name and address. And I got a call, and he says, "I was with a Bill Scheer in Hawaii, and I was an armorer. My name was Joe Gallant." And I says, "Well, I didn't know Joe Gallant. The only Gallant I knew was Puggy." He says, "That's me." And I had been wondering where he was all this time [laughter]. And here he -- well, he went to a small university in Indiana, Franklin University. He was a hell of an athlete. He made Little All American down there as a football player. But the interesting thing about that is I found another fella in -- and he came back, he got out. And he went to college and became a professor, and he retired as the president of a small university in Maine, he was a parachute rigger in the old headquarters squadron [laughter]. Yeah. And so I of course send Christmas cards and so forth. And then the 47th's, there's a buddy of mine that there's quite a story. He lives right down here in Stoughton, Whitey Nelson. He was at Pearl Harbor, but he was at Hickam Field when it happened. And he and I have an interesting story. We were in the headquarters squadron and come payday and by the time he paid his PX checks and his theater tickets and all that he didn't have any money left because we only got \$21 a day once a month. And so --

Jim: \$21 a month?

Bill: Yeah. So he says one day after payday he says, "Junior, loan me a nickel," he says. "I want to get in that black jacky." Well they ran it up to \$55, that's almost three months pay. You know something, I said to him one day when we were talking about this, "You know something, you never did pay me back that nickel." He said, "I'm not going to either" [laughter]. Yeah, as a matter of fact, when I first went in, my first two pays were in silver dollars, they were still paying in silver then.

Jim: Twenty-one silver dollars?

Bill: Yeah. They hadn't gone to paper. Yeah.

Jim: Geez, that's a load for them to carry around in silver dollars.

Bill: I think that's why they went back into currency, yeah, right. That's one thing I wished I'd have kept is some of that, whatever they call it, that war time currency.

Jim: Script.

Bill: Script, like from Hawaii, they had Hawaii written across it. I never did. I kind of wished I had it. There's a lot of things I kind of wished I'd have kept track of.

Jim: They had special script in Korea.

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: Special Army, the dollar bills were about that size, they were small.

Bill: Well, we hadn't gone to that yet. They were the regular dollar bills, but they just had Hawaii written on them.

Jim: Those are quite valuable.

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: If you saved some.

Bill: I wish I did, you know. And I think the reason was in case you were captured or conquered or they took over the island that money would be just deep-sixed. It wouldn't be no good or something, I imagine.

Jim: Sure.

Bill: I don't know.

Jim: So when did you meet your light of your life, after you got home?

Bill: Almost when she was born. We were neighbors out at Glen Oak Hills.

Jim: But you didn't keep in contact over the war?

Bill: No. I never did, never kept in contact. And I come home, see, I grew up when I was -- before my parents died out in Glen Oak Hills just west of here, well, by Crestwood and Hillcrest. It was just Glen Oak Hills.

Jim: I lived near there.

Bill: It was just Glen Oaks Hills in Merrill Crest when we grew up.

Jim: Right.

Bill: And then of course my mother died in '33 and my dad died in '36, so I left there and I went down to Oregon and worked with different relatives on farms down there until I got through high school.

Jim: Did you go to West?

- Bill: No. I went one year to West at my freshman year. Then my dad died that year. He died that December. Then we stayed in the house until, well, my stepmother got running around with a guy and my brother didn't put up with it. And so I jumped on my bike and rode down to my uncle's farm down by -- past Oregon down there. And rode out Fish Hatchery Road. It was all gravel road [laughter].
- Jim: Right.
- Bill: So I got down there and so my uncle says, "What you gonna do?" And I said, "I don't know." He says, "Well, how would you like to work with me?" I said, "Well, I'd like that." So my brother come down to pick me up. My uncle says, "Well, remember what I told you, Bill." And my brother says, "What's that?" I said, "Uncle Hertz says I can come down here and work on the farm with him." Bobby says, "Well, you gotta go to high school."
- Jim: Right.
- Bill: I said, "Okay." And Uncle Hertz says, "No problem."
- Jim: You finished high school training at Oregon?
- Bill: In Oregon, yeah. I worked there on that farm, and then he and I had a falling out. I ran away three or four times in different places.
- Jim: You were a real problem [laughter]. You were a wild kid.
- Bill: So then I went down to my aunt's down at Evanston where my sister was. I ran away from there. I saved my lunch money so I got bus fare, went down to Chicago and got on a bus and they came back to Madison; that was in November, colder than hell. I remember my brother was parked down here in Broom Street. I knew where his car was, and I crawled in it and slept there all night. And I wasn't going to rap on his window because he slept with a gun under his pillow. [laughter].
- Jim: Oh, my. Why?
- Bill: I don't know. He was a gun nut.
- Jim: I guess.
- Bill: He just liked guns. He wasn't dangerous with them. But so --
- Jim: You go down to Chicago. What the hell were you down there for?
- Bill: I was gonna go to school and stay with my aunt like my sister was.



- Jim: I see.
- Bill: But I was put in Evanston Township High School. I go from a school of 172 people to one with 3,000.
- Jim: I was going to say, that was a big school.
- Bill: Oh, God, was it ever. And I didn't like it down there. And so I got into --
- Jim: You'd have had trouble finding yourself.
- Bill: Yeah. So I got -- I ran away from there and then I came back up to Oregon, and I didn't know where I was gonna go. So then this friend of mine, his sister and her husband were gonna start farming that March and they needed somebody to help. So I says, sure, I'll work there.
- Jim: Jesus.
- Bill: So I went there and then I broke my -- well, I had an altercation with him. I broke my glasses, and I said to his wife, I says, "I gotta go to Madison. Is it all right if I go Friday and get my glasses?" And she says, "Sure." So I hitchhiked into Madison, and that night in town, we went to town on Friday night, every town in Oregon. One friend of mine come up and he says, "Boy, you better be careful tomorrow because Lawrence is really gonna work your tail off." And I said, "Why?" He says, "I don't know. He's just blowin' around town and he's gonna work you -- really work you into the ground." So I got up the next morning and done chores, and we were sittin' at breakfast, and I said to him, I says, "I understand you're spreadin' around town you're gonna really work me into the ground." He says, "Well, if you can't stick around here and do your job you gotta make up for it the next day." I says, "To hell with you," and out the door I went and hitchhiked up to my brother's. Well, hell, I was gone, she called my brother right away.
- Jim: The problem child is coming up to your place now [laughter].
- Bill: He and I got into a fist fight. Anyway, so then my other cousin on another farm was down by the State Farm, right on M there, she said, well, you can come and with us. And so I worked there until I finished and graduated. Then I graduated and didn't know where I was gonna go. And well, my cousin says, well, maybe her father-in-law was-- they were workin' shares on the farm with him. And he says, well, maybe he'll let you hire out here and keep right on workin' maybe, you know, for \$30 a month. Well, no. He didn't want me. So my brother come out and we were talkin' about it, he says, what about the CC camp? Sounds good to me. So I enlisted in the CC camp.
- Jim: CC is when?

Bill: In 1940.

Jim: Oh, this is early in '40.

Bill: It would be July; see, I turned 18 in July. So I went in the CC camp in July of '40. And then I was there and then the guys --

Jim: You were there till November and then you joined the Air Force?

Bill: When the guys were all going up and we were gonna -- they came through with that campaign, came through that campaign, Army Air Corps, war and detachment. Guy says, "Hell, I'm gonna join, I ain't gonna get drafted." See, I was only 18, draft wasn't 21 till then.

Jim: That's right.

Bill: Yeah. And I says, well, told my brother and I said, "I'm gonna join the Air Corps."

Jim: In 1940 it dropped down to include 19 year olds.

Bill: No. It was still 21 when I went in, I know.

Jim: Oh.

Bill: I don't know when it changed.

Jim: Yeah; okay.

Bill: And so that's what I did. So I went up and enlisted [laughter].

Jim: So --

Bill: I went up and took the physical, they shined the light in this ear and shown on the wall over there and he said, he passes.

Jim: That's all you need, looks good to me [laughter].

Bill: Fine. The only thing they had to get somebody to sign the enlistment papers.

Jim: That's right. You told me about that.

Bill: So that's --

Jim: Then you got back out of the service, where was that, where'd they discharge you from?

Bill: McCoy, Fort McCoy. I came up from Amarillo.

Jim: You're still single now?

Bill: I was still single, yeah. Like I said, well, I knew my wife -- I was out there and it was her brother. And then there was this other classmate of mine from grammar school. I went out to see him and I got chased around with them. And then, I don't know, just hooked up with his little sister and grew up.

Jim: Well, that was nice. Did she settle you down?

Bill: Well, I guess so.

Jim: I guess so. How many kids did you have?

Bill: Six.

Jim: Well, I guess she did.

Bill: Yeah. Six kids, beautiful.

Jim: You quit running away by this time.

Bill: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Jim: A little bit more responsible.

Bill: Well, see, I went to work for the telephone company.

Jim: I was going to say, what'd you do to support six children.

Bill: I went to work for the telephone company, and they satisfied my itchy foot a little bit because we used to move all around the state.

Jim: Uh-huh. Were you a lineman?

Bill: That was back in the old line crew day.

Jim: Where was your base?

Bill: Right here.

Jim: In Madison.

Bill: Yeah. Then -- well, then I quit the phone company.

Jim: After how many years?

Bill: I was only there three years, I quit and then I went to work for Standard Oil on the road as a maintenance man.

Jim: Oh, okay.

Bill: And that didn't pan out. They promised me I was gonna make way -- see, my dad worked for Standard Oil.

Jim: Oh.

Bill: Everybody's got to go where their dad did. So anyway I wound up peddlin' milk with Bordens for five years.

Jim: Oh, okay.

Bill: After that I had a year with Prudential, and then I got back with the phone company. And I stayed there 29 years altogether and retired in '82 from there.

Jim: '82?

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: So do your kids still live around here?

Bill: Yeah. I've got -- well, the son came back from the Navy. He lives in Middleton. I got one down near Deerfield, one in Waunakee.

Jim: That's nice. You get to see all the grandchildren?

Bill: One -- two in Madison, then I got a daughter that's a teacher down in Platteville, an elementary schoolteacher down in Platteville.

Jim: How nice to be able to see your kids.

Bill: Oh, yeah.

Jim: I got two. I got two kids off in the far west, and you know, I don't see them very much.

Bill: Well, that's like John was gone. We never saw him. But not only see the kids, you get to see the grandkids. We got 13 grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

Jim: I got two great grandchildren but only six grandchildren.

Bill: Well, I got a better base than you have.

Jim: That's right. You should have more.

Bill: Yeah. They turned out. They're all great, they all turned -- they're super.

Jim: Did they?

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: See them frequently?

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: You join any veterans organizations?

Bill: I belong to VFW and the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association.

Jim: Pearl Harbor Survivor Association, I picked up some other names. I think another guy was in Oregon, I can't think of his name Bright or Bigg or something like that.

Bill: Oh.

Jim: I couldn't find him, he's not listed in the phone book.

Bill: Don Buick.

Jim: Yeah, he's not listed in the phone book.

Bill: Isn't he? There's another guy down in Stoughton, Roger Nelson. He don't belong survivors, but he was at Hickam Field. We see him every once in a while; we stay in touch. We don't see him often.

Jim: Do you see the ones who were in the Air Force or the Army?

Bill: Well, that's all I really know or really knew.

Jim: You don't know any of the Navy guys around here?

Bill: No. I only met -- well, --

Jim: Floyd TeWinkle is --

Bill: The only one I really met in the Navy was Bill Yarrow. Did you ever run into him? He's out at Sun Prairie.

Jim: I've heard his name.

Bill: But it's too late now, doctor.

Jim: Is it?

Bill: He's in the nursing home with Alzheimers.

Jim: I got the list. I won't bother calling.

Bill: He was a nice -- he used to get us in the Monona parade before they chucked us out of there; they don't want no part of us, I guess. But no, it's just mostly Army.

Jim: You know Mel Stapleton, I'm sure.

Bill: Everybody knows Mel.

Jim: Right.

Bill: Yeah. Then not only that, but Mel and I went to the same church, too, St. Dennis. And I used to see him a lot out there.

Jim: He's a nice guy.

Bill: He's a wonderful guy, he really is. Then I knew his wife, too. Of course, she passed on.

Jim: Right.

Bill: But --

Jim: Does your Pearl Harbor Association meet on a regular basis?

Bill: We don't have a chapter here.

Jim: I see.

Bill: And we got a state chapter but--

Jim: There must be some publication that comes out?

- Bill: We got a publication and then they meet down in Menominee somewhere at a picnic area, I don't usually -- I haven't gone -- I went to one of them. We were down in Florida when they were having the national. I went over there, and it was all sailors and I don't know any of them.
- Jim: Dressed like sailors.
- Bill: No [laughter]. But my brother is the guy that he went through hell. He was with the 32nd. He left here, he was drafted, went to Camp Grant. He was 30 months in the New Guinea jungle, and he never got out of there.
- Jim: I've run into several guys that did that.
- Bill: The only time he got out of there was when they went to Leyte and he was in that landing, and then they brought him home. But he was so full of malaria, and I think that's finally what killed him. He was so full of atabrine and quinine and that that I think that's - they always said it was a heart attack. He died in his car on Johnson Street.
- Jim: Oh, my.
- Bill: Yeah. He was a city fireman. I mean, he had been on vacation and he stopped down at the Dempseys down there. And he parked and got a haircut, and then he went up to Tenney Park. He liked to watch the guys fish, and it was about eleven o'clock and he left, he was going home for dinner. He got in his car on Johnson Street, and that's before they redid the road. He come over the bridge and his car hit a tree right there. But the lady said she saw him slumped over them wheel, and he was dead before he ever hit the tree.
- Jim: That's a shame.
- Bill: Yeah. But they went through --God, they went through hell down there. He was lost in the jungles too behind the Jap lines for a month.
- Jim: Wonderful.
- Bill: Yeah. He don't tell me -- he told me about it, otherwise he never talked, he didn't talk about it.
- Jim: When the book comes out, you know, in the first group of interviews, you know, I sent in for a book.
- Bill: Oh, you writing a book?
- Jim: Yeah.

Bill: Oh, really.

Jim: Oh, yeah.

Bill: That sounds great.

Jim: It's going to be published this spring. These people are giving it to you at Wisconsin Trails and good parcels around there to get going here. I hardly been out this spring. For some reason I have 216 interviews.

Bill: If you can get all the politicians out of it.

Jim: You're right. So the politicians run this place?

Bill: Well, you gotta be careful.

Jim: Right. I know what I'm doing. [laughter] I got Ray Boland.

Bill: Where do I know him from?

Jim: Well, he's the guy that runs this place.

Bill: Ray Boland.

Jim: He's Secretary of Veterans Affairs in the State of Wisconsin.

Bill: Boland.

Jim: His office on the seventh floor here.

Bill: Boland.

Jim: Ray Boland. He's a Cobra helicopter pilot.

Bill: I know that name from a way back, though. That's what gets me.

Jim: He was with the National Guard before he went into the Air Force. And he never was in the air corps. The Cobras are Army.

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: He's very specific about that.

Bill: See, Wheeler Field has been taken over by Schofield now.

Jim: Has it really?



Bill: That's a chopper base.

Jim: That's Army, see. In Vietnam the Army had more airplanes than [unintelligible] all the helicopters.

Bill: Yeah. That's right [laughter].

Jim: Well, anyway. So that should be out this spring. From now on the interviews I do from now on I put in the chapters in the next book. If I live long enough to do the next book.

Bill: Well, you got something to live for.

Jim: Right. Right now I'd like to get that first one published, and I've had my material now for four months.

Bill: Oh, God.

Jim: And they said they're going to get right at it. But I've given up my material. I'm at their mercy now.

Bill: No.

Jim: But it should be out this spring definitely.

Bill: Yeah. It was an interesting time.

Jim: But anyway, I've got a lot of interviews in there from guys who were in the 32nd Division.

Bill: Oh yeah.

Jim: And their stories are in there. Without any question of all the World War II guys, the guys who had it the toughest were those guys.

Bill: Oh, yeah.

Jim: Over anything in Europe.

Bill: Oh, right.

Jim: It doesn't compare with living in that mud in the heat, the animals.

Bill: In those jungles and everything. Everything, you know. Well, just like --

- Jim: I mean, it was totally unpleasant every second. In Europe, it was okay most of the time and then it got cold and then it was warm, but in here in the jungle, it was a hundred percent of the time.
- Bill: Like Bobby says, next time I'm going in the Navy. At least I have a bed to sleep in.
- Jim: I appreciated being in the Navy.
- Bill: Yeah. He talks about sleeping in hammocks and you had to sleep in triangles. He told me one time he was sleepin' there and so they could watch one another. And he's layin' here and he sees this mosquito. They got mosquito nets, you know, on their hammocks. He saw this one go down, and he saw this one go down and he knew he was next. So he slipped out and he had a knife. And the Jap took off and Bobby shot, and they didn't go after him, but the next morning they found him layin' across the lawn. Bobby got him.
- Jim: Good.
- Bill: But I mean, that was every night, you know. I mean, God, you know, just think going through that. Then he got lost and he got -- he told me he got in a fight with a Jap.
- Jim: This is your younger brother?
- Bill: My older brother. Yeah, he was four years older than me. He's the guy that kind of looked after me after my folks died.
- Jim: Sure. When you needed somebody [laughter].
- Bill: I really wasn't that bad. But you know something, but you know something, when I look back, none of that ever bothered me. I never --
- Jim: It never occurred that how much anxiety you were producing.
- Bill: And not only that, everybody said, well, weren't you envious of people. No, I didn't -- guys get new cars. My one buddy, his folks gave him a car when he graduated. I said, why would that bother me. None of that stuff ever bothered me. I didn't pay any attention to that [laughter].
- Jim: Well, you were a loose cannon back then.
- Bill: I used to think that they came and let it go at that. But it was funny. But Bobby was tellin' me that when he was -- when he was lost that time and he and this Jap got in a fight and they went over the ledge, and Bobby just happened to land in a bunch of bushes here, and the Jap kept goin' down there. This is in the Owen

Stanley Mountains of New Guinea, and he got all cut up, that's how he got jungle ulcers. And the natives took care of him until they finally got him back to his base. And when they were gonna cut his legs off, and Bobby says, no, no. He still had the jungle ulcers, but he didn't let 'em.

Jim: Yeah.

Bill: But just little stories like that, you know. He don't say much other than that. But, yeah.

Jim: When did he die?

Bill: Oh, God. He's been dead, he was only 49 when he died.

Jim: Oh, really.

Bill: Yeah. He died in 1960 --

Jim: That's a young age to have a heart attack.

Bill: He died in what was it, '60 -- let's see, he'll be dead -- he's dead 34 years. So it'll be '67. Yeah.

Jim: Okay, sir.

Bill: Well, thank you much.

Jim: You're welcome.

**[End of Interview]**