

#227 ANTHONY IANTORNO: CAMP MALAKOLE

John Martini (JM): Today is December 8, 1991. It's 4:55 in the afternoon. My name is John Martini from the National Park Service and this is an oral history tape with Mr. Anthony Iantorno. On December 7, 1941, Mr. Iantorno was a sergeant in the 251st coast artillery arrangement anti-aircraft, stationed at Camp Malakole. He was twenty-one years old at the time. This tape is being produced in conjunction with the National Park Service and television station KHET in Honolulu. Thanks for coming.

Anthony Iantorno (AI): Thank you.

JM: How'd you get into the Army, specifically coast artillery?

AI: Back in 1939, the work was kind of slow, a little bit, so I thought personally I'd join the CCC camp, but my mother kind of objected to that. She thought it was too far up in the mountains, you know. So I said, "Well, there's a National Guard duty out here that will pay a dollar a day, Mondays and Fridays, two dollars a week."

This would give me a little extra gas for my car, so I thought I'd join in 1939. And from there, it led into coming into the service. September 16, 1940, President Roosevelt called us into the service and we was the first reserve National Guard unit to be called into the service in World War II. And we was sent to Ventura for two weeks, for six weeks, and from there, we was sent to Hawaii, because the fleet was stationed in Hawaii, and they needed anti-aircraft protection around Pearl Harbor.

JM: Can I ask you a question? When you got here, did they explain to you that the mission of the 251st was to protect the fleet or the harbor entrance . . .

AI: Yes, at the time, it was told that we were to protect the fleet and harbor.

JM: And when you got up to Camp Malakole, about what time of the year was that? When did you arrive?

AI: When we first went to Fort Shafter for about a week, they decided maybe they didn't have room there, so they moved us out to Camp Malakole in late November of 1940. And we set up tents, and of course, out there, all you had was keawe trees and algaroba trees, with those thorns. You remember those thick thorns? Anyway, we proceeded out there and after we'd been there for about a week or so, we had a tremendous rainstorm and the water got to be about two foot high and just washed us all out. And we had to move everything up on the higher ground because our foot lockers and our shoes, and everything else was pouring right down to the sea, I guess.

JM: Were you just like living in tents, then?

AI: We was living in tents at that time.

JM: Camp Malakole, that's way outside Pearl Harbor for any seriously involved location.

AI: Yes.

JM: Did you get into town much?

AI: Not very often. We used to have our trucks haul us into town, maybe like once a week, we'd come into Honolulu until about midnight, then we'd have right there at the YMCA downtown?

JM: Yeah.

AI: The truck would pick us up there about midnight, when the last truck would leave, and take us back to Camp Malakole, which took about an hour to get back there.

JM: How did you like Hawaii before the war?

AI: Before the war?

JM: Before the war.

AI: Oh, I thought it was a wonderful place to come to, but of course, getting off Camp Malakole was a little bit different than what I thought it would be. But the islands were very beautiful, very green, very nice and the people are very friendly. Very, very friendly.

JM: Did you find any restrictions on your actions and where you could go, because you were enlisted as opposed to officer?

AI: Yes. Right. At the time, the enlisted men could go downtown and maybe go to the YMCA, or Wo Fat's, or Black Cat cafe, or whatever. But we was sort of off limits out here in Waikiki, at the Royal Hawaiian. I don't think we --- I don't believe I ever remember going in the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, but we always used to walk around it, but I never went in. I thought it was strictly for an officer at the time.

JM: When you were at Malakole, how did you spend your time out there? Training, maintenance, what was it?

AI: Well, the first six months, we built our camp. We'd go to Nanakuli and Makaha beach up there. We'd load up our sand on the trucks, take it down to the camp, then go out, pick up coral rock that was along the beach, take it to a rock crusher, crush it up, made our own cement and poured our own foundations, built our own shore lanes, built our own camp. Put the walls up. Put the roof on. Run the electrical in, and put the plumbing in. And then after we got it all built, about two months after we got it all built, we went into some training then. We used to fire at the targets towed across from Barbers Point over to Nanakuli. And then they'd turn around and come back and we fire again. And after we done that for about two or three months, on and off, then the war broke out and we never was back into the barracks from then on. From then on, we was in tents, all the way through the South Pacific.

JM: Tell me about the equipment that they were providing up there at Malakole.

AI: The --- you mean the artillery equipment?

JM: Yeah.

AI: Yes, we had fifty caliber machine gun water-cooled, which would fire about 600 rounds a minute. And we first had thirty-seven millimeter anti-aircraft guns. And a little later on, we managed to get -- forty millimeters came in.

And we was the first unit in Oahu there to have the new type guns, forty millimeter guns. So we trained on that for while.

JM: And did they ever train you guys in plane identification or insignia identification?

AI: Oh, absolutely. We had training on the different planes. They used to have cards you could pull out from behind you like this and hold it up for a minute and then put it back. And we would identify whether it was a P-40 or a B-17, or maybe a Messerschmitt [Me]109, or possibly a British Spitfire. And we knew the Japanese Zeroes and also the Val torpedo bombers, that we knew.

JM: They . . .

AI: Oh yes. As a gunnery sergeant, that was the one thing I was trained in.

JM: Did they specifically -- I think it would be more for Japanese planes than anybody else.

AI: Well, it seemed like we concentrated more on that. Although we did know all the other countries too. We even knew the German planes and Italian planes too. But I think we concentrated a little bit more on the Japanese planes.

JM: So as gunnery sergeant, were you a chief of the peace, or were you a loner, or what was you specifically doing when the (inaudible)?

AI: Well, I had fourteen members of my gun crew and I was in charge of the whole gun. In other words, we had a fifty caliber machine gun which had three or four men on it, and then we had forty millimeters, which had another eight or ten. And then we had a couple of 'em, other men that operated the generator, which operated the guns, you see. We had to have power to operate the anti-aircraft gun with a director. We had a director to pick the plane up then track the plane and also the elevation and traverse, you see. And we had to have electrical power and so we had two men on the generator. So I was in charge of that whole gun crew. Okay.

JM: And how many guns in your battery?

AI: We had eight guns to a battery and we had four batteries, so we had thirty-two forty millimeters, yeah, forty millimeters and forty fifty caliber machine guns.

JM: So how did you spend Saturday night, December 6?

AI: Well, believe it or not, I came to Honolulu and went to the Willamette football game, which they lost to University of Honolulu -- won that, I think, twenty-four to seven, or something like that. I remember that. Then we went back about midnight, we went back to Camp Malakole.

JM: And the next morning?

AI: The next morning, I was on the way to breakfast, or actually I was at breakfast. And Sunday mornings in the Army, you always get your eggs and bacon, pancakes, potatoes, whatever, cooked the way you like it. Because some of the men were gone to town, so there was a little more time. And I had my breakfast cooked just the way I liked it, and I was walking back to the barracks a little before eight o'clock. And I was walking with Corporal McCall, he was my gun

corporal. And we heard the roar of these planes coming by and we looked up. And I remember Corporal McCall saying to me, "What the heck kind of planes are those, Tony?"

And I looked up, and I said, "Well, it's not one of ours, that's for sure."

And I looked again, and when I saw that red insignia on the side of the fuselage, I said, "Those got to be Japanese planes," because we had plenty of maneuvers between the Army and Navy, but we never saw a plane like that before.

And about that time, the tail gunner, the rear gunner on that plane, looked down at me and I looked up at him, and I could see his eyes and he could see my eyes. And he had across the top of his forehead here, a ceremonial band of some kind, and he looked down at me, and he had -- I don't know whether it was a grin, but he had a look down at me like maybe we caught you surprise. I don't know what. Anyway, he swung that machine gun around and when he started to spray us, that is when I threw my bacon and eggs up in the air. And you know, I thought about that in the Pacific a few times, because when we had those powdered eggs and we had those lousy pancakes that were like rubber pancakes, I thought about that breakfast I threw away that morning.

JM: Were there --- was this a big flight of planes going over you?

AI: They were just coming by in pairs, two and threes. They didn't come by in ten or twenty. They would come by --- two would come by and maybe two more. They didn't come by in a big group. See, they broke off and these were torpedo bombers.

JM: They had the torpedoes?

AI: Yes, the torpedoes. They dropped down real low and they came around, and they circled around Barbers Point and came over Pearl Harbor and then it was able to drop low on that channel and drop their torpedoes at a low altitude. But they came in not more than a hundred feet above the ground. And my first reaction was to go to the barracks, 'cause the captain had told me about two weeks, three weeks before that, "Take your rifles and don't leave in front of the barracks, in front of the door of the barracks," because they didn't want a saboteur to come in and grab all the rifles like this and take off with the rifles, you see. And we'd have nothing to protect ourselves with.

JM: That's a, you know --- was there a fear that the local Japanese men might do something?

AI: We had a fear of that. We would --- that's the first thing we talked about. It didn't happen, of course, but that's what they talked about. I think because Germany had done that a lot, invading Poland and Czechoslovakia, and Austria, and Holland, things like that. They always had the fifth column -- saboteurs and you see what I mean. And they sort of thought about that, because I understand General Short had put all the planes together, you know, and issued out the orders for everybody to secure down and protect themselves. But the thing that came to me was when Captain Bustering came in, he said to me about, I guess, about ten days before December 7. That he said he just came back from intelligence report. And he didn't tell us all that, all the men in the barracks. He just told me one night. He said they saw a Japanese carrier, Japanese fleet, battleships, carriers, destroyers, troop transports and oil tankers in the South China seas, heading past the Philippines, down towards

Singapore and Malaysia, Dutch East Indies. He says, "You know, the report said they didn't locate any carriers."

So I said, "Well, what does that mean?"

He said, "I don't know, Tony." He said, "I just don't know, but I know that they didn't spot any carriers."

JM: So that was relayed all . . .

AI: That was related to me, yeah. Yeah. But he didn't --- and I said, "What does that mean?"

He says, "I don't know." He says, "I really don't know. All I know is that they don't know where the carrier are at."

That is all he said. And I don't think he knew either.

JM: Let's get back to you were hunting for gun.

AI: Oh yeah.

JM: Yeah.

AI: Yeah, okay.

JM: So, did you . . .

AI: So, when I ran into the barracks, we had some ammo, thirty caliber ammo there in the end of the barracks, and so I was able to get some clips and put it in my rifle and then I went outside and start firing. Think I fired a couple of clips, maybe ten rounds at the Japanese plane. And I thought at first, maybe I could hit the torpedo, but that was ridiculous. And then I thought, well, maybe I can hit the pilot up there flying by. You know, you have to kind of lead a plane like you do a bird, or a goose rather, that flies by. So I tried that, but that didn't work out. So we did have a fifty caliber machine gun there, which we brought out, set up, but then we had to start belting our ammunition, try to belt it, you know what I mean.

JM: You didn't have any in the boxes?

AI: We had only two canisters of thirty, two canisters of 300 rounds and when we fired, that was all gone.

JM: So then you had to go . . .

AI: We had to start belting it. And you know, ammunition is set on a tray like this, ten. And then you put ten links on there, and you push it forward like that and you shove those shells right through the link, you see. And then you would do another ten. But it takes you quite a while to belt 250, 300 rounds of ammo.

JM: And how long did you think it was between the time when you first came over and you had your first good look at the aircraft was Japanese, to the time when you started fully answering?

AI: Well, we started answering with our rifles within a couple of minutes, I thought. But it was another ten minutes or so, fifteen minutes before we fired the first machine gun rounds at 'em.

JM: Did you get your big guns in there?

AI: No, the big guns, that's something different. The big guns take a long time to haul 'em down to Pearl or even set 'em up there, because they've got to get those legs out, our ammo. Most of our ammo was at Makalapa Crater.

JM: So your guns weren't in fixed position . . .

AI: No, no.

JM: . . . ready, you weren't ready for . . .

AI: No. The ninety millimeter guns were all along the firing line, where we had just got through firing a week or two before, with canvas over the top of them. Now those guns had to be lifted up and hauled into Pearl Harbor and then set back down again. See what I mean? But a fifty caliber machine gun, you can set that up in, maybe, thirty seconds to a minute, at the most.

JM: How did the rest of the attack go?

AI: Well, then of course, as I looked over towards Pearl, as I looked over towards Pearl, I could see the -- by this time, the dive bombers were sort of circling around like this. And one of 'em would come down like this here, and drop down like that. And then, it would take off like this, here. And I must have saw ten or fifteen planes up there, just circling around like that and coming on down like that. And so this --- by this time, we had got our trucks over there and hooked up our forty millimeter gun, put our fifty caliber on the back of the truck, threw on the gear on as fast as we could, and we got into Pearl Harbor just as the second attack, about halfway through the second attack, we pulled into Pearl.

JM: Where'd you set up?

AI: At Hospital Point.

JM: You actually went all around the . . .

AI: All the way around the harbor, through Pearl City, Waipahu. Pearl City, all the way around, past Red Hill, past Makalapa Crater, came into the main gate and all the way down to Hospital Point. We set up there.

JM: So what happened then?

AI: Well, by the time we got our guns set up and everything else, it was all over with. It was the last --- I could --- they were still firing at the last plane up above, and the way that I understand, it was this Commander Fuchida, he was the last one up there, circling up above and the anti-aircraft guns were trying to get him, but he was above it. He was too high.

JM: Oh, so he . . .

AI: He was more than 20,000 feet up there and I don't think our guns shot more than 20,000 feet.

JM: When you get to Hospital Point, as you come through the Navy yard, what did you see?

AI: Well, as we come into the main gate, the Marine guards were there and they had the same instructions that we did. Our instructions, we don't allow any saboteurs to stop us from getting to Pearl. Right? The Marine guards had the same instructions, "Don't let anybody into Pearl that you don't know."

See, and that was their job. And as we come around the main gate, come around like this to the main gate, it crossed my mind, I hope that Marine guard over there doesn't open up on us because we weren't stopping for anything. We just barreled right through that gate at about forty-five miles an hour. But luckily, he was smart enough not to fire at us, but he had his gun like this, you know. And I wasn't too sure what he was going to do.

JM: Did you see much of the real damage as you were making the . . .

AI: Oh yeah, well, oh sure. The ARIZONA was burning and the rest of 'em was burning, and it was quite a mess to be honest with you. But what the problem was, the Navy was shoot -- I think it was the Navy -- was shooting their ninety millimeter guns up, or their ninety, or their anti-aircraft guns up, but they didn't set the fuse on some of them, see. And when they're going up, but then they were coming down. And every once in a while, you'd see explosion all around you and I thought, well, they're dropping bombs on us, but it wasn't that at all. It was the shells going up and they were coming back down again.

JM: What went through everybody's -- what were their feelings, yours especially . . .

AI: Yeah.

JM: . . . out in the basin?

AI: Yeah.

JM: Everything is breaking all around you . . .

AI: Well, I know the feeling of the workers out in the field, because we went by Waipahu, in that area there where the sugar cane, pineapple. I know the people were scared because I remember seeing two or three of the local people working in the fields, grabbing their kids and some of them had their babies on their back, I think. And they start running towards their house, a little house they had there. And I could see they were scared. They were really scared. They wasn't sure -- well, they wasn't sure whether we were going to open up on them, because I don't know if they were American-Japanese or they were Filipino, or I don't know who they were. But they looked Oriental, so naturally they were a little bit afraid of us and I could see the kind of look on their face, that they were running towards the house, getting in there. And one girl just pulled her shade down like that and she just peeked outside as we went by.

JM: What about the GIs? How did the GIs feel?

AAI Well, the GIs were pretty mad. They were pretty mad. Myself --- it almost felt like I was dreaming something. I just felt like maybe what's going on here? You know what I mean? I knew that they were bombing us, but yet it didn't seem real. It didn't seem real to me until that night, I got thinking

about it a little bit that night, after we shot down some of our own planes. I got to thinking about that, that night. And I got thinking, wow, what's going on here? And then it sort of dawned on me what happened. We were so busy at first, you don't really think about it, you know what I mean? There's so much going on.

JM: You mentioned that about that night. Were you guys involved in the . . .

AI: Yeah, we opened up. We opened up. We -- somebody started firing, I don't know who. Whether it was one of the other ships, or who, somebody opened up fire. And that night, everybody opened up fire. I mean everybody. That sky was lit up that you could sit there and read a newspaper at night. And they shot 'em all down. I don't know whether it was two planes, or four planes. I'm not too sure now. But that's how nervous everybody was.

JM: Had the word been passed that there was planes coming in?

AI: Well, no. No. The only word that we got on our radio -- we had a radio called IFF, identification friend or foe, and what it said on there was Japanese paratroopers are landing at Barbers Point. And that turned out to be wrong. And I think what happened -- I heard later what happened -- there was a couple of our pilots flying around and they ran out of gas or in trouble, and they parachuted down on Barbers Point. And somebody saw them coming down and reported in they were Japanese paratroopers. That turned out to be false too. But that made everybody nervous, I think. So we didn't know it was false at that time. So there was firing all over the island that night. It was just like fourth of July. It was terrible. Yeah, yeah.

JM: After fifty years, coming back and looking at the place again, what kind of thoughts go through your mind?

AI: Well, that's a little hard to say. I mean, I came back mainly because I thought fifty years this might be the last time we all come back, at least many of us will come back. And fifty year seems to be a good year to celebrate. And I brought nineteen members of my family and my brother brought his two grandkids and my cousin Joel brought his three grandkids, and we wanted to show the kids what happened at Pearl Harbor, tell 'em what happened at Pearl Harbor. Being as they remember not to be aggravated or hold any grudge against anybody, but just so that they know the history of our country. You know, 'cause I don't think that our history books tell enough about World War II, especially December the seventh.

JM: What should people remember about December the seventh? You said not hold a grudge, but what's important to remember about it?

AI: Yeah, yeah. Well, I don't. I don't hold anything against the young Japanese people today. It probably would have been nice if at that time the government would have said, well, maybe we're sorry about it, years ago. And here it is fifty years ago and they still haven't decided for sure whether they made a mistake or not. So I think, maybe. But that's beginning to disappear and I think people are beginning to realize, hey, we should be friends. Because the world is getting a little smaller, you know. We have to be friends.

JM: What's the single most vivid memory that you have when you were a twenty-one year old, right in the middle of an attack?

AI: The two things, seeing the Japanese eyes and then over there, at Hospital Point, seeing 400 bodies laid out on the lawn, where the corps men and the nurses was going through, trying to identify who they were, because a lot of them was burnt, had oil all over them. They didn't have the dog tags on. And just walking over there that morning for breakfast, just seeing what was going on there, that sticks up in my mind.

JM: Did that take it a whole other level, the medical . . .

AI: Yeah, that sort of changed it all for me, I mean. Then I began to realize what happened. Once you see the bodies, you begin realizing what happened. The rest of it looks like it might have been a movie to start with, you know what I mean? But when you see the dead bodies laying out, then you begin realizing what happened.

I don't know what else to say, but.

JM: Well, I want to thank you for sharing your story with us.

AI: Okay. All right. You went through this before?

JM: I never had to at all.

AA: I'll be darned. Well people haven't heard of Camp Malakole. But you know, if you go down to the Park Service at the Memorial down there, got out there where you got that circle, there's a map out there, right? And you'll see Camp Malakole right next to Barbers Point. Okay. All right.

JM: Thank you.

AI: All right, thank you. Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW