

# ‘Sunday morning, here come the bombs’

An interview by David Venditta Of The Morning Call, December 7, 2002



Pearl Harbor survivor Paul R. Moyer of Richland Township in November 2002.  
(Don Fisher/Morning Call file photo)

*Milford Township native Paul R. Moyer enlisted in the Army in July, 1940 and landed in Hawaii in the fall with the 21st Infantry Regiment. A year later, on the sunny Sunday morning of Dec. 7, the 19-year-old private first class got up from his bunk in Schofield Barracks to report for duty.*

*Sixty-one years later, Moyer, now of Richland Township, remembers the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.*

At 7 o'clock that morning we had breakfast in the mess hall. Creamed beef on toast. That's what they served on Sundays because it was the fastest thing to make. Then three of us left the barracks to go on a work detail, which was a cleanup job somewhere, I don't remember. We were supposed to start at 8.

We were walking outside and about five planes came over, about 400 feet up, if that. We looked up, figuring they were ours.

“What's going on?” we said. “They've got their insignias covered with a red circle.”

We stood there and watched them like idiots, until we saw the black smoke coming up from Wheeler Field, the Army fighter base about a mile away.

“Hey, there's something wrong here! We'd better go back to the barracks!”

We ran back and waited for a while. Then we got word that the Japanese had hit the island, that Wheeler Field, Pearl Harbor and Hickam Field were bombed.

Wheeler Field had its fighter planes lined up like cars in a used- car lot. The Japanese just came right on in

and blew them up.

The planes had come in over Kolekole Pass, over Schofield and down to the Navy base. Our barracks weren't hit, but the artillery guys on the upper part of our post told me they'd gotten strafed.

There are some weird stories about guys going up on the barracks roof with machine guns and firing at these planes that came over. Well, what we had were water-cooled machine guns, with a hose and a gallon can. You would've had to go to the supply room, unlock where the ammunition and the guns were kept and carry everything up onto the roof, which was three stories high. By that time, the planes were over Wheeler Field.

The odd part about the attack was, we were supposed to be on maneuvers from the week after Thanksgiving to the week before Christmas. We were supposed to go up to Eucalyptus Forest and bivouac.

But we got called back to the barracks on Friday the 5th of December. We couldn't figure out why.

We put our full field packs and everything else away. Saturday morning, after inspection, we were allowed to go. That night we were on our own. There was a Japanese beer garden on the upper post where everybody in the artillery group went, and all the drinks were free.

The people who worked there knew what was going to happen. The Japanese had scouts all over the place.

I was out drinking beer at Wahiawa, a town within walking distance of the barracks, and got light-headed, but I was back in the post by 11 o'clock, which was curfew.

Sunday morning, here come the bombs.

We loaded up and got out of there, went to the Eucalyptus Forest to get ready for any kind of raid they might pull on us.

A couple of days after the attack, we went to secure Kolekole Pass so the Japanese wouldn't land troops at the big beach in back of it.

The 35th Infantry got there before we did, and they were firing, and nobody could figure out why or who they were firing at. Here, they had seen people digging, and they thought the Japanese had landed and were digging foxholes.

But it wasn't the Japanese. It was the 3rd Engineers burying cases of ammunition. They didn't want to keep the ammunition in bunkers because they were afraid it would be blown up.

The 35th Infantry kept firing on the 3rd Engineers until they were told to knock it off.

Nobody got hurt that I know of, but you talk about confusion. You've never seen so much confusion in all your life.

My dad received a telegram that I'd been killed in the Japanese attack. He didn't know the truth for three months because we were out on bivouac and weren't allowed to send anything home. Finally, I sent a V-mail letter saying everything was OK.

We stayed in the forest and trained and went on maneuvers.

But I had a ruptured appendix in March of '42 and was rushed to the hospital, where they took the appendix out. I couldn't go on active duty anymore, so I was transferred to a group that wasn't allowed to do maneuvers, 4Fs you might say, but we still belonged to the outfit. We did work details, and I became the supply sergeant.

My outfit went to Okinawa. They wouldn't let me go, so I stayed on the islands and didn't see any action.

I guess there was somebody looking over me.

At Pearl Harbor, Japanese planes wrecked five battleships and damaged eight others. Eleven smaller ships, including cruisers and destroyers, were also damaged. Across the island of Oahu, 323 American planes were damaged or destroyed.

The American dead totaled 2,335 servicemen -- 1,177 on the battleship USS Arizona -- and 68 civilians.

Moyer served with Company E of the 21st Infantry

Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. He was discharged as a staff sergeant in July 1945.

He worked for the B.F. Goodrich tire company in Oaks, Montgomery County, for 33 years.

Now 80, he is Pennsylvania chairman of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, which has about 1,000 members in the state.

He lives with his wife, Mary, and has two daughters, Diane Davidson and Nancy Lamonta; two sons, Andrew and Dave; 12 grandchildren, and a great-grandchild.

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