

'The most real maneuvers you're ever going to see'

An interview by David Venditta Of The Morning Call, December 7, 2005

Joseph B. Moore grew up on a Wayne County farm, got an electrical engineering degree from Lafayette College in 1940 and worked for the Scranton Electric Co.

Drafted into the Army in April 1941, he was sent to Hawaii as a replacement and assigned to the 98th Coast Artillery Regiment (Antiaircraft), becoming a master gunner.

On the morning of Dec. 7, 1941, Cpl. Moore, 23, was returning to his barracks after breakfast when the drone of airplane engines caught his attention.

Now 87 and living in west Allentown, Moore remembers the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor 64 years ago -- the event that brought America into World War II.

It was almost 8 o'clock, and I was alone on my way back to the barracks from the mess hall. Not many guys ate breakfast on Sundays, but I was a farm boy who normally did. When I got back to the barracks, I probably would have sacked out.

I don't remember what I did the night before, probably just laid around. I didn't have any reason to do much of anything else.

We were at Upper Schofield Barracks, probably two miles from Wheeler Field, the Army fighter base. They called it Upper Schofield because we were up the side of the mountain from the main Schofield Barracks, where the regular Army infantry regiments were. They'd put us in this camp built by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

It couldn't have taken me more than 5-10 minutes to walk the 200 yards from the mess hall, which was at the end of our row of barracks. On the way, I heard these airplane engines, and I said to myself: Something is going on because the boys down at Wheeler Field don't fly on Sundays.

After I got to the barracks, it all appeared very vividly.



Pearl Harbor survivor Joseph B. Moore in his Allentown home in November 2005. (Morning Call file photo)

Thirteen Japanese torpedo bombers came down over the mountain from the Kolekole Pass, heading toward the harbor. There was no question about it. They had the "rising sun" on the side of those planes. It was as big as a side of a house.

I'm guessing these guys were not more than 1,000 feet off the ground. You could see the silhouettes of the pilot and the gunner in the plane, and a torpedo that was about 80 percent of the length of the airplane. They were less than a mile away, turning right to make the

harbor from where I was standing.

My watch read 7:50. I ran into the barracks and said to my buddy, Russ Krell, who was from Allentown, "Russ, the Japs are attacking us!"

He'd been asleep in his bunk. He said, "Joe, you gotta be kidding."

I said, "Come out here and watch!"

We stood around the stoop in front of the barracks, and we could see smoke and fire at Wheeler Field and we could hear the bombs.

I said, "They're attacking Wheeler Field."

He said, "Joe, the Air Corps must be having maneuvers."

"Russ, they're the most real maneuvers you're ever going to see."

And with that, this one plane that had dropped his stuff at Wheeler came whoopin' by with his machine guns running. He was low, just up off the ground, strafing the area between our barracks and the one next door. You could see the dirt flying.

It was too close. We both got back in the barracks.

Essentially, we just sat around. Other guys were there, but not everybody. Some were on weekend leave, and a lot of them were in town, Honolulu. It was a pay-day weekend.

There were some guys I heard about who actually got rifles and did some shooting. But our rifles were locked up in the barracks, and the ammunition was someplace in the supply room.

I was in the barracks when the island shook like it was having an earthquake. From the force of the jolting, I had a pretty good idea what had happened: A battleship was blowing up.

Later that day, everybody knew what had happened to the USS Arizona. One level bomber had come over with a big bomb that went down the hatch, hit the powder magazine and blew the bow off.

Oh, those poor sailors!

I finally went up to my office at regimental headquarters to see what was going on. They were in the process of getting our guns up on the wheels to take them down to Wheeler Field. That was our mission, to protect Wheeler Field from air attack.

We had four or five 3-inchers -- 75mm antiaircraft guns. They were trailer-mounted for transporting, with Mack prime movers to haul them around.

They did get the guns down that day, but not in time.

But two or three weeks before the attack, we did have the guns at Wheeler Field. There was an island-wide alert. We took the guns down there, set them up, wired them up to fire and hauled ammunition so if something happened, we could take some action. Also, the P-40 fighters were placed in individual dirt revetments to protect them from strafing.

We were there overnight. Col. Potts came down the next day at lunch and said, "Well, fellas, they've changed the orders. We're now going to be on a sabotage alert. You take the guns back up to the parade grounds, and they'll haul the ammunition back to the ammo depot."

The P-40s were pulled out of the revetments and put in nice neat rows in front of the hangars, so they could be guarded by one man with a rifle against sabotage.

At Upper Schofield, the guys who were patrolling our barracks area for sabotage were doing it with empty rifles, because they had put a few holes in the guard-house roof loading and unloading them.

That's the way it was on the morning of Dec. 7.

Later that day, at my desk in the regimental headquarters office, I learned how devastating the attack had been. Practically all the fleet that was in the harbor had been sunk or damaged. Fortunately, the aircraft carriers and their escort vessels were out at sea. Nearly all the combat aircraft were destroyed, including a flight of new B-17 bombers that arrived in the middle of the raid at Hickam Field.

Sunday night, we sweated. Coming over the radio

were messages of the Japanese landing on this shore and that shore. All were false. Somebody was putting out messages that they were sure the Japanese were making an amphibious attack, which of course didn't happen.

Our guns were firing at clouds or anything that sounded like an airplane. Everybody was uptight.

About 2 o'clock the next morning, somebody was cranking the gas alarm. Supposedly the Japanese were dropping bombs with gas in them. Everybody ran to the supply room to get their gas masks, which were left over from World War I.

It turned out that the mess sergeant, who was fixing breakfast, was having trouble with the oil-fired ranges in the mess hall, and they were smoking. Somebody had thought it was gas.

By Monday morning, the serious position we were in really became very obvious. Being right next to a military airfield with a war going on and not seeing any of our aircraft flying made us feel helpless.

On Thursday of that week, a flight of B-25s came in over the mountain. They sure were a welcome sight.

Epilogue

Moore left Hawaii for stateside in March 1942 but would return to the Pacific.

He applied for and attended Officer Candidate School at Fort Monmouth, N.J., getting his commission as a second lieutenant in the Signal Corps in July 1942 and getting married three days later.

The next year, he shipped out for Australia with the 1006th Signal Company Service Group. It had duty with the 380th Bomb Group of B-24 Liberators at remote Fenton Field, 150 miles southeast of Darwin.

From there, Moore went on to New Guinea and Leyte. He was at Clark Field on Luzon when the atomic bomb exploded over Hiroshima, and on Okinawa when the second bomb devastated Nagasaki. Then Japan surrendered, and World War II was over.

Back home, he returned to Scranton Electric, which

PP&L bought in the mid-1950s. In 1961, the family moved to Allentown, where Joe continued to work for PP&L. In the last four years before his retirement in 1983, he supervised the night shift at the Berwick nuclear plant, then under construction.

An Army reservist, he retired as a colonel in 1974.

He and his wife, Susanna, have a son, Joseph Jr., and two grandchildren.

"It was a long war," says Moore, who served a total of 37 months in the Pacific, "but I feel very fortunate and very thankful that I was never wounded or otherwise injured. I was in at the start and saw the finish, and I am still here to talk about it."

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