

America's Change After Pearl Harbor, Joining the Air Corps, Civilian Pilot Training, Tactical Training, The Forward Squadron

RK: Oh, okay. Yes, it was - okay, well. On December 6th, 1941, my dad said to me, "there's no way in the world that we're gonna get in that European war. Just no way." And everybody in America said the same thing: "no way are we gonna get mixed up in a European war again. On December 8th, there wasn't a person in the country that didn't say, "we're going to war." Overnight, the bombing of the islands, Hawaiian Islands, turned the thing around. Just like that, overnight, America changed completely, from anti-war to "go get 'em." And I remember we only had one place where you go to join up - recruiting station - in town, and the line went as far as you could see. People standing in line the day after Pearl Harbor. That's how much America changed overnight.

Anyway, and I of course was ready too. I was in the first year of college at that time. And so my buddy and I went down and signed up to join the army - the Air Corps. And they said, "well, we don't have a place for what you want to do" - I wanted to be a pilot at that time - so I signed up for the college civil pilot training program, and I took a year of that and learned to fly. And then when I finished my year of flying - with what was called "civilian pilot training," C.P.T. training - when I finished that, I went down and joined up again and they said, "come on, we're glad to have ya." So I joined up, and it took almost a year to finish the training course. Since I wanted to be a fighter pilot it took a little longer. But I was in training for just about a year.

And then I was sent to tactical training - combat training - for about, oh, four or five months. And then they sent me to the Pacific. And I was first sent to New Guinea, which is the Southwest Pacific. And assigned to the 9th Fighter Squad and 49th Fighter Crew, 5th Air Force. The squadron was a P38 Fighter Squadron. And I had trained in P38's, so it worked out quite well. And I served with that squadron for 14 months during WWII. Do you want me to go into a little bit of that now?

SA: Yeah, sure, I would love that.

RK: Okay. We were plying P38s - we flew P37s for a while, but mainly P-38s - and our squadron was called a Forward Squadron. And whenever General MacArthur, who was in charge of the operations in the Southwest Pacific, and as we pushed the Japanese back and we'd move from one place to another, we would move with it. And since we were an advanced squadron, we were the first ones to go to this jump. So we kept making those jumps, jumps, jumps, all through the war.

I joined the squadron in October 1943, and I was in the squadron for almost 14 months. And then I was sent home. I ended up in, um - my last combat location was in the Philippine Islands, during the invasion of the Philippines. And my last battle was the Battle of Leyte Gulf, which was the largest sea battle in history. Which was quite an adventure, to say the least.

