

The Day of Infamy

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The newsreels, movies, slick productions, and the 50th reunion of the attack on Pearl Harbor all have depicted December 7, 1941 from various perspectives. What they have done for me is to help me put together some of my remembrances of this day. It is interesting that in 1941, many people hardly knew where the "Territory of Hawaii" was, let alone that there was a U.S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor. Because it is a part of our history, I feel it is appropriate to jot down some of the perspectives of a ten year old boy.

It was Sunday and I had a slight cold, so was not getting ready for Sunday School at Central Union Church. However, Marilyn, my sister had already gone. I don't remember how we found out what was happening at Pear Harbor, but I do remember Mother being concerned about Marilyn returning home. We had heard the booming from the explosions early on, but simply dismissed them as "practice" by the military.

There was a point that we had to know what was going on, so some of the neighbors, I don't remember who, went up on Rocky Hill in the "pasture" behind Punahou School. From this vantage point there one could view the city of Honolulu from Diamond Head to Ewa and Pearl Harbor. It was clear that something was not right— there was fear and frustration of not knowing the details of what was really going on. It was very clear that vast columns of thick black smoke were coming up from Pearl Harbor and Hickham Field, the Army Air Force Base nearby. The sky was filled with the small black puffs of the limited anti-aircraft fire. We soon saw why. A single Japanese fighter bomber was circling close to the band of "haoles" standing on a bare hilltop taking this all in like a bunch of tourists as he was executing his second run to the target areas. When we saw the plane it was not clear to us whose plane it was until the unmistakable rising sun emblem left no doubt. Below us were some isolated fires in the city. They were close to one of the electrical sub stations, and we speculated that might have been one of the targets. but more likely it was the result of some of the falling debris from the anti-aircraft fire.

I think everyone has heard the term, "rumors are flying." It could not have been more true in this case. No one could believe that the Japanese would attack Hawaii and not follow up with ground troops. When would they be here? What should we do? There might be trouble with the water supply, so everyone fill their bathtubs with fresh water. Get ready! Get ready! —but for what?

Some time during that morning Dad decided he needed to go down to his medical office which he shared with a group of doctors. I never did know why. So Mom and Dad and I went to downtown Honolulu to the Dillingham Building where his office was. There were virtually no cars on the road. One Army MP stopped us as he stood in one of the intersections. I'm not sure what his role was, and I don't think he did either. He probably was told to keep people off the streets, and that he did tell us.

I was in the fifth grade and one consequence of the Sunday attack was that there was no school on Monday. In fact, no students returned to the Punahou School campus until years later. The Army Corps of Engineers took over the campus and encircled it with a barbed wire fence. (Later that was not to deter small boys from finding a point of vulnerability and doing extensive snooping.) Our class met one of the local church kitchens for a while. Our next door

neighbors, the Halfords had one class in their large play room. Classes were scattered all over. The fear was to have large groups of people all in one place if the Japanese were to return. One night some time later, I don't remember how far after the seventh, one lone plane did get through. He knew he was over the island, but he was not sure where. He did what he came to do—drop a bomb. It landed harmlessly on Tantalus, a hill up in Monoa valley. It was enough to scare the bejesus out of me and showed us all just how vulnerable we were.

Punahou made some arrangements with the University of Hawaii (there was only the Monoa campus then) to use the education buildings. We were in the lower part of the campus in a building that was designed for the lower grades. The junior and senior academy students (junior and senior high) students were in the upper and lower floors of one of the other classroom buildings. Mrs. Gail took us in tow and we prepared for our wartime schooling.

War time preparation was for everyone and that, for some, meant leaving Hawaii. And some of my classmates did just that. The others of us fell into line with the civilian defense regulations. Since that first night, there had been a complete blackout. No lights— and that continued for about two years. The attack was all too fresh in everyone's mind and caution was the watchword. The kitchen, bathroom, and downstairs family room windows were all covered with light proof window shade material taped around the edges with brown paper tape so that no light would leak out into the darkness. Air raid wardens patrolled the neighborhoods at night to make sure all complied. There were metal rims and a striker bar hanging from utility poles to serve as an alarm in case of a gas attack. We all carried ID cards complete with fingerprints and stamped entries of when we got our shots and when our gas mask was issued. One day I had to walk home to get my gas mask, as I had forgotten to bring it to school. This was serious stuff. I remember the day the family drove to one of the elementary schools to get our gas masks. They were in large heaps fresh from some military stockpile. I felt fortunate that mine was a new one and had a crisp unfaded olive drab color. We learned to take the cord designed to be tied around the waist in addition to the standard shoulder strap and do a little cable knot tying to keep it neat. I had a little American flag pin that adorned the flap to show the intense patriotism at the time and to easily identify the mask as mine. The preparedness continued once we started classes at the U of H campus. Air raid trenches were dug along with above ground bunkers complete with rows of benches along each side. Other than being used for drills, the only time they were used was for hide and seek by the younger set and a place to make out by the older set. The mounds of dirt from the excavations were often planted with potatoes or nasturtiums to prevent erosion. In Mrs. Gail's fifth grade class we cut up small squares of old flannel to be used with some dilute solution of Clorox to neutralize the mustard gas. The fears left over from World War I were prevalent. No one really knew what the Japanese would be up to next and we were versed on what the warnings of mustard and phosgene gasses were. (New mown hay was one sign, although none of us had ever experienced it in Hawaii!) The little squares of flannel were carefully stored in the old style coffee cans with the metal lids that were initially removed with the key and strip of metal that unwound from the can itself. There were those in charge of taking these essentials to the trenches in case of a drill or real attack. Also included in these emergency supplies was a supply of baking soda solution and large handkerchiefs to be used in lieu of a gas mask should the need arise and someone was lacking a mask. One major concern was that of parents of infants and how to protect their children in the

event of a gas attack. Someone devised an enclosed papoose like pack with a filtering devise on it. I never saw one, but I do remember the concerns.

A couple of days after the seventh we were all outside looking sky-ward at the squadrons of planes arriving from the mainland. The P-38 aircraft with their distinctive double tails was one that we were all familiar with and could identify easily. I think at that time was the start of the feeling of unity and patriotism. What was Japan thinking by attacking us! We were strong and there was a common bond in the people of the islands. Something I think was different than those on the mainland. Practice black outs, newspaper accounts, rationing and other inconveniences were not the same thing. We in Hawaii had experienced something quite different. (Everyone was involved in the war effort including seeing loved ones leave for war, however.) Later I was to see some of this same common understanding in our renters in South Pasadena. The Adamsons, who were in the Philippines teaching, had been interred in Santo Thomas Internment Camp by the Japanese. They had scars and tiny bits of dark shrapnel still visible as a reminder of their experience.

Part of the local effort based on perceived need and this intense spirit of patriotism was the B.M.T.C. (the Business Men's Training Corps). These were men who wanted to do their part, but were too old for the military. I became aware of the organization through Joe Martin, who lived next door. Who the sponsor of this group was, I don't know. But I do know they were issued uniforms with a B.M.T.C patch and a weapon. Joe had a Thompson sub-machine gun, complete with cooling fins and cylindrical magazine holding some 100 rounds of .45 cartridges. It was something right out of an old gangster movie, except this was real. As a young impressionable ten year old, I wondered what their mission would be. If the Japanese did invade the islands, as many thought they might, then it would be the locals fighting the bad guys in the mountain terrain. Like most young boys, I fantasized about being involved in this conflict, and I pictured what my role might be— messenger, food gatherer, or maybe I would get to shoot that sub-machine gun! In retrospect there is no doubt in my mind that adults rarely think seriously about what might be going on in a child's mind in a crisis situation.

Because of the potential of the Japanese returning, the entire island of Oahu was surrounded with barbed wire. Large A-frame sections were festooned with lengths of barbed wire. These sections could be moved so that there was access to the beach in principle areas like Waikiki, however. We had them at our Lanikai beach house too, also with a movable section for beach access. I wonder how many miles of wire that represented-- surely there had to be one entire freighter designated to carry just barbed wire!

Downtown Honolulu was awash with the white and khaki uniforms of the military. On Saturday mornings I went to the YMCA swimming and crafts program and could witness this mass of humanity. On the streets there was an abundance of hawkers encouraging the soldiers and sailors to come in to their shops to buy cheap souvenirs. Street photographers would take your photo and then develop the picture on the spot under the cover of a black cloth. Their hands had the brown chemical stains of their profession.

Speaking of "professions," we used to go down to the Rex Hotel entrance to watch the lines of service men, some with bulging pants, awaiting their turn with the practitioners of the oldest profession. We would giggle and thought it quite funny! When people think of a hotel in Hawaii, a room with a view of the beach and high prices come to mind. The Rex was a seedy downtown hotel common to many a big city. Any thoughts of immorality were outweighed by

“any accommodation for the boys that are defending our country.” My mother felt safe knowing I was in a wholesome program at the “Y,” but I’m sure didn’t know that my walking around downtown included a slight detour to check out the Rex.

As part of my Saturday morning YMCA thing, I was out and about with my little plastic “Brownie” camera to take pictures to be developed later in the traditional contact print black and white fashion. The two halves of the camera pulled apart after unlocking, and the shutter release was pulled to one side for the first shot, then the other side for the next. I can’t count how many times I was offered a significant sum by servicemen to buy my camera. Hawaii was the ideal place to take pictures and with the influx of people, the local supply of cameras was quickly exhausted.

As the war continued all consumer goods were soon in short supply. Only those things that were deemed necessary to the war effort had priority. Cargo ships were all carrying things to support the war in the Pacific any only basic foods medicines and consumer goods were available. On the mainland, there was a system of ration books for food, shoes, and gasoline. In Hawaii we only had gas rationing stamps. Those on the mainland had stamps to get valuable sugar and butter and shoes, but for some reason unknown to me, this was not the case in Hawaii.

Because Dad was a physician, we had a “C” card for gasoline. It was the card that allowed the most gas other than commercial carriers and the “T” for trucks. The local supply for dairy products, meat, coffee and the like was very limited, so they all became short in supply. Surprisingly, hoarding was not a common practice. People had the feeling of pulling together, as is common in many crisis situations. Prices were high, however. Fresh eggs were \$1.50 a dozen, and watermelon was a good \$5, quite a sum for the early 40’s. The Mediterranean fruit fly made growing fruit a arduous process. Each flower, on blooming, had to be bagged to protect it from the pests. Watermelon fields had guard towers and fences. A backside full of bird shot was not worth the risk. Oranges were truly gold, and were simply not available for the most part. They could not be effectively grown in the islands, and shipping them from the mainland was a low priority.

Most people dug down deep and salvaged all of the scrap metal that they could find. Aluminum cans weren’t around yet, so most of the things that were saved were crushed tin cans and waste fat from which the ingredients for explosives could be made. Strangely the cast metal toy soldiers depicting all sorts of war action figures were available. On my frequent trips downtown I always went to Kresses Department Store. They had all of the things that the “5 & 10 cent” stores had at the time. It might be likened to a Newberry’s or a tiny Target store. I always headed to where they had bins and bins of various lead soldiers, cap pistols (*a la* Dick Tracy), and other toy guns complete with rubber bayonets. I amassed quite a collection of lead soldiers, an ambulance with an opening rear door to allow a reclining bandaged soldier on his cloth and wooden stretcher to be placed. Two lead soldiers with hands at their sides accommodated the stretcher on its route to the ambulance. I had little toy cannons that would actually shoot by pulling back on a spring loaded rod and releasing. The war was foremost in everyone’s mind, and of course the toys reflected the times. It is interesting that I don’t recall any Japanese or German solders with whom we could do battle with our lead army.

Everywhere there were signs of the war effort. Posters depicting the Japanese as slant eyed monsters were everywhere. “A slip of the lip will sink a

ship!" -- "Be American, Speak American" was designed for all of those speaking Japanese! After all, 60% of Hawaii's population was Japanese at the time. The Japanese that we knew as a family were typically the more educated— my Dad's colleagues and our friends at school. There was never any sense that they were in any way connected with Japan to the extent that there was an association with the war.

At a roadside fruit stand on the way to Lanikai, we stopped the car to check the produce. My sister Myra and her husband Arnold got out, and Arnold practiced his Navy intelligence training in conversational Japanese on the proprietors. They showed fear and were very uncomfortable with a uniformed officer speaking the language that they became afraid to speak.

News of the war's progression did not have the advantage of today's sophisticated communications. As a child we heard newscasts over the radio, but not directly from the front, and it was always after the fact. There were maps in the newspapers and places in Europe and especially unknown islands in the Pacific became familiar. It was disturbing to me to hear about all of this chaos, but at least we were not directly involved. We were but a stepping stone for those who had to travel to those troubled places. The realism of the situation came to light when the newsreel editions of the latest news from the front would appear on the "big" screen. When I would go to the Saturday movies at the Palace Theater, we would stand up for the projection of the waving flag and the playing of the Star Spangled Banner. It would then be followed by the "RKO Radio News" or "Pathe" news or such. That would be followed by some short subject, maybe Popular Science, the mandatory cartoon, and then the main feature. Often these were war movies, although cowboy and Abbot and Costello movies were also kid favorites. On Saturday mornings there was also a serial which would be continued the next week. These included Captain Marvel of "Shazam" fame, Superman, Buck Rodgers of the 21st Century, and of course Commander Craig of the Coast Guard, who was always catching Japanese spies trying to sneak into the U.S. or attempting to steal some military secret weapon. Someone was always trying to destroy some important place, ship, or plane with a ray gun, bomb, or the like. What excitement! It would be called propaganda or brainwashing today. Filling all of those young minds with such prejudice! A crime! For shame!

The war years were part and parcel of my growing up. Those years from ten to the day we left Hawaii in December of 1946. Some of the other sections of these writings will contain experiences during those critical years.