

DECEMBER 7, 1941
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Almost fifty-three years have gone by since December 7, 1941. Being a young girl at that time, my recollections of pre-war Hawaii have somewhat dimmed. However, that terrible day of Sunday, the Seventh of December, remains ever clear, pertinent, and frightening to me today as it did the day the Japanese attack occurred.

In those pre-World War II days of the "old army," the army took care of its own; not only the soldier, but his family, too. It was a curious type of life, far different from that of the civilian. Army families were as much under orders as the soldier was. Being an "Army Brat," my growing up years could not compare to those of a child not encompassed by a military life style. The army provided for us, took care of us, protected us, and when orders were given, the family obeyed without question.

I was most fortunate to have been living on the island of Oahu before "That Day." My father, John Wetterau, was an army career man, a non-commissioned officer stationed at Schofield Barracks, Oahu. At that time this was the largest army post the United States had, housing infantry, artillery, and cavalry units. My father was attached to the Hawaiian Division, 24th Infantry Division, 19th Infantry Company. We were quartered in on-post housing, just simple wooden structures, on a small rise overlooking Wheeler Field, an Army Air Corps Base for fighter and pursuit planes, which adjoined Schofield Barracks.

Thinking back to those days, I know that those were the halcyon days of the thirties. Hawaiian days of gold and sweetness, of sun and "liquid sunshine," nights so clear and sparkling with stars like twinkling diamonds, and the ever flowing soft tropical trade winds drifting with scents of island flowers.

Hawaii then, as it is today, was a multi-racial land and was often referred to as the "Crossroads of the Pacific," composed of city-type people, small town people, farmers, and beach dwellers. A beautiful, lush, slow-paced land; an idyllic place for a child to grow up in; an absolutely happy, incomparable environment to me. Visiting Honolulu, about twenty-two miles from the base, was always a high point in our lives. No high-rise buildings and no freeways; a city where various cultures met; an intriguing city. Going to the many beaches—other than Waikiki—you would find few people, some surfers who still used the old heavy koa wood boards, and lone native fishermen using the same techniques their forefathers had used—fascinating! One memory that comes to mind is that of the few full blooded Hawaiians that we came in contact with. Their melodious soft voices never ceased to lull me to a special kind of serenity; a happy, gentle, and generous people.

Those peaceful days were soon coming to an end. Europe was at war; London was coping with the "blitz." War nervousness was drifting closer to Hawaii. Army and Navy strength began to build up. The citizens of Oahu began to participate in "black-out" exercises in 1939, 1940, and 1941. There was no doubt at all that the military was preparing for both attack and counter-attack. Rumors were flying in 1941 that a large, powerful Japanese force would attack Oahu, which was an important site as it was America's military headquarters of the Pacific. In one edition of *The Honolulu Advertiser* newspaper, dated November 30, 1941, headlines read, "Japanese May Strike Over Weekend." Military alerts had been

called at various times throughout 1941 and I remember the anxious unsettling aura that rested on everyone. Many quiet conversations were held between my parents regarding "what if, etc." My father had instructed my mother to take my sister and me to the hills above the post if and when the Japanese attacked. An alert was called the week before December the 7th and then called off December 6th. Interesting and befuddling!

Saturday, December 6, was a typically beautiful Hawaiian day, though different for my family as my father had to be at his company. Different, as Saturday was his day off and was usually a family day which we would spend doing special things together; especially at this time of year for the excitement of Christmas shopping which was upon us. Dad got home unusually late from his company that night. We seemed to sense something strange might soon be occurring; an unsettling sensation was felt.

The prelude to the United States becoming involved in a total world war began at 7:55 a.m. the next morning, Sunday, December 7th. We were awakened by ominous sounds of heavy "thumps" in the distance, accompanied by a noise similar to myriad strings of firecrackers being fired off. My father said it sounded as if a mock battle was in effect between army and navy (a frequent exercise), and thought it strange the company had not been notified. My sister and I thought the firecracker sounds might be coming from a nearby town of Wahiawa involving Oriental religious rites. Suddenly, a tremendous explosion occurred at Wheeler Field. Our little house felt as if it had been kicked off its foundation. Running outside, we could see black smoke and flames fuming from the flying field's buildings. My father turned to us and said, "This is war!" Another bomb dropped and planes with rising suns painted on them were zooming all around us. I'll never forget the expression on my father's face this day; indescribable, really. He had to leave us for his company, as prior orders had stressed. Strapping on his side arm, he told mother, "You know what you must do," and left running from the house. The bombing and strafing continued. We would run in the house from one side to the other as the planes came machine-gunning over. Mother told us to "keep down, to get under the beds," but being curious kids, we would peek out the windows and could even see the pilots in their planes, they were so close as they zipped over the houses on their way to the Field. I don't believe I will know such inner fright again in my lifetime. We could also see soldiers running, fleeing for their lives, up the hill to our line of quarters away from the burning buildings, some attaining safety and others lying where they fell.

When the first lull came in the bombing and strafing, Mother drove us to the hills in the old section of the base. We were just catching our breaths when a military policeman appeared and sent us on to Dad's company. Arriving at the 19th Infantry barracks, we were ushered into the mess hall where mass confusion reigned. Women and children crying, soldiers rushing about in battle array, orders being shouted, and various ones saying, "the Japanese have invaded the island; Honolulu was in flames; Hickham Field was no more; the fleet was destroyed, etc." Someone did rally us into a busy, useful purpose, that of rolling bandages, as the hospital needed bandages desperately. The station hospital was located next to the 19th Infantry. I remember my father getting some of his men organized into machine gun crews, manning them on top of the barracks to protect the hospital. More bombing, more machine gunning, soldiers aiming their rifles at the planes as they flew over. The noise was horrendous. The mood was of total fear and

somberness.

When darkness fell, orders were given that all women and children were to be evacuated from the post, being taken to a safer locale via Honolulu silver transit buses. The sounds of bombs and explosions were still being heard near and far; the rat-a-tat sound of machine guns persisted—our men or the enemy? In total blackout, the buses traveled at a snail's pace on the narrow, winding road away from the base, drawing closer to Pearl Harbor. Flares from planes were being dropped; we could see tracer bullets being fired. Of course, fear and panic existed in all; anything moving being shot at, including our own planes. As we drew closer to Pearl Harbor, a "cauldron of fire" seemed to take the place of the harbor—surely we wouldn't get any closer, but we did, getting caught up in a chaotic jumble of cars and men trying to get back to their bases and ships. Now the harbor looked like the description of "Dante's Inferno." Women began crying, children sobbing, the noises of cars braking, explosions, gunfire—it wiped out all sense of reality. I recall sinking down to the floor of the bus. I didn't want to see or hear anything more and covered my eyes and ears with my pillow.

Finally, our bus brought us to our destination, a Hawaiian school in the hills above Pearl Harbor. Tiredly and bewilderingly, we all tumbled off the buses into the awaiting arms of the school personnel, who were so kind, loving, and dear to us. Tables were to be our beds, but no one could sleep. Early the next morning, one Japanese plane flew over and dropped a bomb in the hills above the school. (No doubt an amphibious plane which had missed its target.) In a flash, everyone was on the floor under the tables.

We could not return to the post for five or six days, still having very little information about our status, only that Oahu was now under martial law. Returning to Schofield Barracks, we found air raid shelters had been dug in our front yards, a machine-gun crew was set up across the street from our house, and we found machine-gun bullet and shrapnel holes all through our house, even through the front screen door. All dependents on the post were given new identification cards and gas masks with orders to have these items on our persons at all times.

We were given orders that we all were to be evacuated to the States by ships and would only be given two hours notice to get down to the Honolulu docks when the ships came in. We assumed this would take place right away. But this was not to be.

Each day seemed to be a difficult one, not knowing what would happen or when, but feeling that the Japanese would return, especially after we had learned that our fleet had really been "knocked out" of commission by them. The air raid alarms would sound almost daily, sometimes several times a day, which would mean running as fast as we could into our shelter. The Japanese were keeping their submarines maneuvering about the islands. We had heard that a few of the little harbors on the other islands had even been shelled and that several of our small ships had been fired upon. One early morning in March 1942 we awoke to the drone of a couple of planes—definitely not ours. We had a heavy cloud cover and these planes sounded as if they were lost and searching. The air raid alarms went off and down into the "hole" we ran. After hearing some distant "thuds," the all-clear sounded. We learned later that two amphibious planes had been launched from a Japanese submarine to bomb military targets. The clouds prevented them from completing a successful mission and they dropped their bombs off shore and

on Mt. Tantalus' slopes.

Every one of us on base dependents began to wonder if we ever were going to get off of this island. Certainly not a paradise island anymore, but one outfitted militarily for war. Beaches and government buildings were now all fenced with barbed wire; gun emplacements were everywhere on the island. The easy, slow paced Hawaii was gone. Oahu was now an island prepared to defend itself.

In early May 1942, we got our "call" and were trucked down to Honolulu in army vehicles to board a British ship, the *Aquatania*, once a luxury liner, but now stripped down to serve as a troop ship. Troops were getting off the ship as we were being herded on. It broke my heart to leave my father!

Our days of fear had not ended yet. We were escorted out of Honolulu harbor by a few navy vessels, but once the harbor was cleared, these escort vessels turned back and we truly were on our own on that unfriendly Pacific Ocean. Before reaching our destination of San Francisco, we were attacked one night by an enemy submarine, shots fired, depth charges dropped. Our salvation was the speed our ship was able to put forth. We out-ran the submarine, throwing us off course, and reaching San Pedro, California, where we were taken off the ship by navy launches and brought to land and on to the army base of Ft. MacArthur. Our orders were then "cut" and all dependents were sent off to various destinations. We really were displaced people—refugees now with the safety and protection of living on an army base behind us.

Our family waited out the war in Oregon and eventually were rejoined with my father, now a major in the U.S. Army Intelligence and retired after serving close to forty years in the U.S. Army.

Former President F.D. Roosevelt called the 7th of December a "date which will live on in infamy." It certainly was a frightful, appalling day of terror; a day which prompted the battle cry, "Remember Pearl Harbor," for our nation throughout those war years. May such a day never be allowed to befall the United States of America ever again!

