

# My Pearl Harbor Brief

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Early Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, my friend and I decided to drive to Hickam Field for breakfast, about 25 miles away. We were at a recreational camping area that had no mess facility. It was located on the west side of the Island of Oahu. After passing the Wheeler Field area, we saw three small aircraft, single engine, flying very low overhead in the same direction we were driving. I had never seen these aircraft before. I said, jokingly, to my friend, "Those aren't our aircraft. I wonder whose they are? Ya know, we might be at war."

A few minutes later we were approaching the Hickam Field/Pearl Harbor area from the north. We were on slightly higher ground. This gave us a wide panoramic view of the destructive activities taking place. In one word – war!

Several aircraft were bombing the ships and buildings. We entered the Hickam Field gate and went directly to our squadron orderly room. I asked our adjutant, "What should we do?" He said, "Be damned if I know."

I decided to go to the large barracks across the parade ground. It was almost a big mistake on my part. Just after I started, I was fired on by a Zero. I turned around and ran back towards our barracks. It dawned on me that I was simply and foolishly in his sight. His target was the large barracks in the first place.

A line of several men had formed at our supply room to get rifles and ammunition. I got in line. The line was slow moving because the supply Sergeant wanted rank, name and serial number. We were strafed with concentrated burst. Several men were hit but no fatalities. The Sergeant dispensed with signing and said, "Come and get em."

Surprisingly, the Japanese bullets were much smaller than ours. One bullet penetrated a commode in the latrine. It spun around and came to a stop.

By 8:30 a.m. I had acquired a rifle, two belts of rifle bullets, and a hand gun with several clips of bullets. I fired eight shots with my rifle and emptied a clip from my pistol at four different Zeros. There was no immediate indication of a hit.

I visited the big barracks. There was no activity for picking up the dead. However, several wounded were being helped into various vehicles. A trench was being bulldozed close to the hospital for the burial of body parts.

Some men, at the barracks, were killed by concussion alone (not a scratch on them). They were inside the metal wall lockers for protection. The metal wall lockers amplified the concussion caused by the bombs.

I had noticed from our barracks that several Zeros were bombing an open field on the other side of the large barracks. It didn't make sense. Later, I learned that the open field was to have contained our aviation fuel dump. Apparently the Japanese had only the original airport layout plans. Later plans relocated the fuel dump near the air traffic control tower. What a ball of fire the fuel dump would have made. The nice thing was those bombs did no damage, but it did prove that the pilots were accurate.

Our large depot was now in heavy smoke. Several hangars were bombed. Interestingly, all hangars with aircraft were bombed. There is no doubt in my mind that the Japanese pilots had radio contact from the ground.

I heard that Japanese said to the guard at the gate, "I guess you now know what the Japanese can do." The guard shot him. I heard that story several times from different sources.

We were advised not to stay in the barracks, especially at night. I spent the first night under the palm trees between John Royers Airport (now Honolulu International) and Hickam Field, cleaning machine gun parts and assembling them using bed sheets to lay the parts on.

The next morning, sun up, I realized that my gun position was close to hundreds of bombs and many fuel tanks. I didn't know it, but I was inducted into the coast artillery. Later that morning, a friend from my squadron saw me and said, "Our commander wants all men to return to the squadron immediately." I found the Captain in charge and told him I was required to report for duty immediately. He said, "You left your post! I can have you shot." I said, "I gave you a lot of help last night and besides, I fix aircraft." He said, "You're lucky I don't have you shot!" What a jerk. I should have just disappeared.

It is my opinion that the Japanese made two mistakes the day of the attack: one, for attacking Pearl Harbor, and two, for not unloading three or four troop ships. They could have taken the island. The Japanese population was about 51%. The Pacific war would have been extended and the Japanese would have had their Pacific "lake" several years more. The Battle at Midway may not have occurred. Our success at Midway turned the tide of the war.

I could not understand why we had not been on at least token alert. Much of our armament was stored in Diamond Head. Just reading the local newspaper about the atrocities committed by the Japanese soldiers against the Chinese civilians was enough to make me believe we weren't free from harm.

For what it is worth, an incident occurred December 6, 1941, late in the evening near the camp area on the west side of the island that should have been an early warning signal. An early model black car was parked on the beach which I considered to be a lover's rendezvous. We kids in Pennsylvania would stand on the running board, rock and roll the car, just to be helpful. Approaching the car, I was surprised to see four heads, perfectly motionless. I stopped. Then I noticed two very high antennas mounted on each corner of the rear bumper. I felt something sinister. With my eyes wide open, I instinctively began backing away, turned around and ran as fast as I could.

I didn't know much about communications and navigational aids at the time. This incident flashed back to my mind with unbelievable clarity, for the first time in 1945, when approaching the north Adriatic Sea at 30,000 feet, flying a B-17. I had just bombed Vienna Marshalling Yard, at night, in a single aircraft using radar for navigation. Recalling the black car incident at the moment puzzled me for several weeks. I finally concluded that I was in an apprehensive retreating mode, both times.

Another event worthy of noting occurred early in the evening of December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1941, in downtown Honolulu. The streets were loaded with sailors. The fleet was in. The bars and shops were filled. The only vehicles, slow moving, were shore patrols – the Navy equivalent of military police. Some of the bars were giving free drinks. I never saw so many drunks. I heard that the brigs on board ship were full. Some drunks were laid out on the decks. Some never knew what hit them.

The U.S.S. Oklahoma rolled over from sustained hits during the attack. Men were trapped in the hull, helpless, hopeless. The tapping from inside the hull was heard for a few days and then faded. I decided not to witness the tapping.

I believe it can be said that most soldiers in battle are confined to the area they are at at the time of engagement. In my case, I was at liberty to move about unrestricted. It was Sunday. I did not see my commander. He was very friendly with Dorothy Lamoure. He brought her to the squadron one day and we all had pictures taken with her. My daughter has that photo to this day.

In 1942, our squadron was ordered to be relocated to NADI on one of the Fiji Islands. I was now an aerial engineer, crew chief, gunner; electrical, engine and propeller specialist on the B-17 aircraft. Therefore, I was on the advanced flight team. We flew via Christmas and Canton Islands to Fiji.

The native males wore skirts. If they were big, they were males. Both male and female wore a big ball of hair. We were advised that the natives living at the base of the volcano were still cannibals. A large number of the civilian population was from India.

One evening, U.S. Navy pilots from one of our carriers were using our gravel runway for proficiency night landings and take offs. Tower control advised the Navy pilots taking off to keep the tower well to their left. They did. Too far left. Consequently three SBDs wrecked three of our B-17s that were parked on the right side

of the runway. Things began to look bleaker. We were down to three B-17s. One SBD propeller chewed up the number one engine on the first B-27. It took us over three weeks to remove an engine from the worst wreck and remount it on the first B-17. We used a very flimsy tripod to hoist the engine, working over the grass. You do what you must under such conditions, very slowly.

It was a lucky thing that I went to the headquarters at Hickam Field and retrieved my application papers for flying cadets before I left for Fiji. After being at Fiji for approximately five months, I learned that I could resubmit my application for cadets through the coast artillery. I did. A few days before March 17, 1943, (my birthday) I was on board a Dutch freighter, Bosh Fontaine, destination: U.S. mainland.

It was a slow boat. Although a great arc course would take us southeast of the Hawaiian Islands, our initial course was more eastward, then to the north to avoid Hawaii at a greater distance. After 21 days on the high seas, we arrived at Los Angeles April 4, 1943.

I now understand why I delayed writing this brief. It was not without pain.

After boot camp, primary basic and advanced flying schools, I got my commission and wings on February 8, 1944. A whole new life opened up to me. I was assigned to Hobbs, New Mexico for first pilot training on the B-17 Flying Fortress. How sweet it is!

May I gloat a bit? Half way through cadets I was asked if I wanted to be a cadet or an aviation student. I said, "What's the difference and why?" The payroll officer said, "Seventy-five dollars per month as a cadet or you can remain in the service as an s/sgt and receive regular pay plus flight pay." I said, "Aviation student." He said, "Wise choice. General Arnold is looking out for you. Also, the pay is retroactive." Next payday I received quite a roll of bills. I gave it all to my mom. I learned a few years later that "Hap" Arnold made a promise that he would not forget the enlisted men in the Pacific. He didn't. General Arnold was the first chief of the new U.S.A.F.