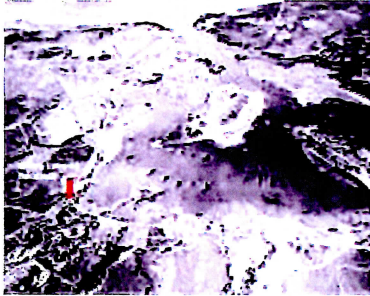


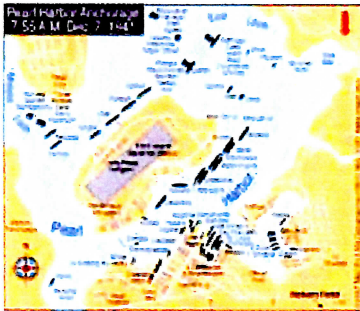
Walter T. Oka

Eyewitness view of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941

On December 7, 1941, the climate in Hawaii was, as usual, peaceful, serene, and sunny with a trade wind breeze flowing from the mountain side towards "Battleship Row" on the east side of Ford Island, which was situated in the middle of Pearl Harbor. I lived in a sugar plantation town of Aiea, where my father and four of my eleven siblings worked.



Our house was a former nurse's quarters of the old Aiea Plantation Hospital which was located on a bluff about 50 feet above the shore of Pearl Harbor and about one mile away from Ford Island with a panoramic view of the harbor. The ward section of the former hospital was used as a dormitory for the single Filipino workers.

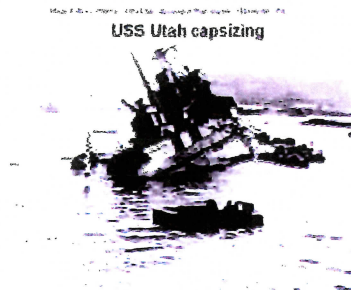


Ford Island is where the battleships docked on the east side and several cruisers, the USS Utah, and a tender secured on the west side. The aircraft carriers moored on the south side of the island. The other destroyers and cruisers were anchored on the north and north east side of the harbor.

In 1941 it was routine for the whole Pacific fleet, after their weekly sea exercises, to return to Pearl Harbor on Friday. It was like a parade of ships; led by destroyers and followed by cruisers, auxiliary ships, battleships, and aircraft carriers. The reverse would occur on Monday. Also, on Sunday mornings, the U.S. Army Air Corps would simulate mock attacks of dive bombing on the battleships and I would stand on the porch and watch these exercises.

On December 7, 1941, I was a 13 and a half year old youngster listening to the radio in our living room with three of my brothers, Shizuo, Kazuyoshi, and David, and two of my sisters, Tomie and Yoshie, and my dad. At about 7:50 A.M., we heard the sound of roaring airplanes and subsequent heavy explosions and machine gun fire. We ran out to the porch to see what was happening.

I looked towards the harbor and saw many formations of dive bombers swooping down on the battleships, low flying torpedo bombers heading towards the battleships and my brother, Kazuyoshi, saw the planes dropping torpedoes. With over 100 aircraft buzzing all over the ships causing explosions, fire, and dark smoke billowing in columns skyward from the damaged ships, I was stunned and in awe.



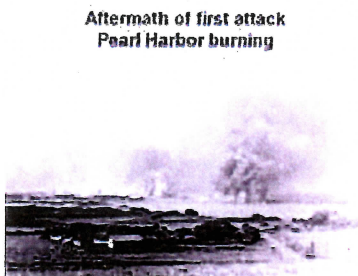
I saw the USS Utah on the west side of Ford Island start to topple and capsize. Almost simultaneously, the USS Oklahoma was slowly listing and in about 5 to 8 minutes capsized completely.



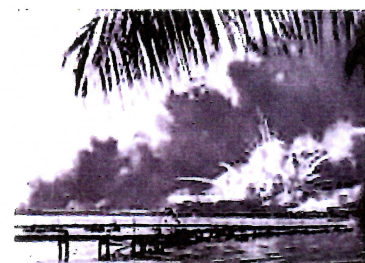
No sooner, a horrific explosion of the USS Arizona occurred - which I can only explain in onomatopoeic terms, "KAAA-POWWW!!!" - flames roared and smoke towered skyward and a few seconds later, the concussion from the blast hit my body with such force that it caused me to stagger back.

In all of this mayhem, I said to myself, "Boy! The Army is mad at the Navy and is dropping real bombs and torpedoes at the ships. They must be really, really mad at the Navy". Remember, this is the mindset of a 13 and a half year old boy, who, on Sunday mornings, witnessed many, many previous mock attacks on the battleships by the U.S. Army Air Corps. During the attack, a plane flew overhead and I saw the "meat ball" insignia on the wings and, only then, did I realize that it was Japanese planes attacking our ships.

After about 30 minutes of roaring planes, gun fire, and explosions, it became quiet except for some occasional explosions and flare-up of fires. The columns of dark smoke from the burning ships flowed high toward the sky and southward toward the sea. I did not see any planes being shot out of the sky during this first attack.



Soon after, the roar of about another 100 planes appeared and started their second attack on the burning ships, port facilities, and ground facilities on Ford Island which was a Navy airport. All of a sudden, I saw and heard a spectacular explosion that filled the sky with a fireball of flame and debris.



The shock wave was not as noticeable as when the USS Arizona was hit. Later, I learned that the ship's name was the USS Shaw, a destroyer, which was in dry dock.

On the second wave of attack, the damaged ships were ready and fired many anti-aircraft guns, and machine guns at the attacking planes. You could hear the blasts of the weapons and many flaming planes streaked across the sky and crashed into the harbor. A couple of machine gun bullets hit the top of our roof, but somehow, it never occurred to us that we were in danger and kept watching the attack in awe.

Aerial view of the second attack



All of the roar of the airplanes, anti-aircraft gun bursts, machine gun fire, streaking planes in flames crashing into the harbor, the continuing explosions of the ships, and billowing columns of dark smoke filling the sky and flowing southward to the sea, presented a surreal experience that brought the thought: "Is this for real!", but it was quickly dismissed by the reality of the experience. Then, after another horrific 30 minutes or so, the roar of the airplanes disappeared and all was quiet.



Then, I noticed little boats with fire hoses trying to quench the fire and other boats milling around the damaged ships and later learned that they were picking up survivors who were either blown off the ships or dove into the harbor for safety.

Later that day, I saw trucks with blood stained wooden coffins passing below our house on Kamehameha Highway to a temporary burial ground in the near-by Red Hill area. That very day, it was announced by radio, that martial law was in effect. No lights were permitted after dark and windows had to be covered according to regulations before we could turn our lights on.

After the first attack, two of my older brothers, Mitsuo and Kazuyoshi, reported to the Aiea Plantation mill. Another brother, David, who was a student at the University of Hawaii and a member of the R.O.T.C. program, was ordered to report to the university and we did not see him for 8 weeks. He returned home and was discharged because he was Japanese. The government reclassified all Americans of Japanese Ancestry (AJA) from A-1 to 4-C, which is a classification of an Enemy Alien. Later, in 1943, the AJAs were reclassified back to A-1.

On the second day after the attack, a sailor from the USS Arizona, who said that he was on the deck during the attack and was blown off into the water and a marine, who jumped off the capsizing USS Oklahoma, came to our house to secure my brother Haruto's ham radio equipment. They were friendly and stayed at our house until the radio equipment was removed from our house. During the attack, my brother was with his in-laws in Waiialua which is located in northeast Oahu. He was later interrogated by the FBI and cleared. Finally, he was reimbursed only \$500 for his radio equipment which was actually worth \$ 1,000.



Less than a week later, two FBI agents came to our house seeking a Walter T. Oka, who knew so much about the ships in the harbor. I had collected as many match covers of naval ships as possible that moored at Pearl Harbor. I became very familiar with the names and locations of the ships. I was not at home when the agents came and saw a family picture on the wall and asked my brother, Haruto, which of the boys was Walter. He pointed at the youngest boy and the agents were disappointed and left.

EPILOGUE

Eight weeks after the attack, the soldiers who were of AJA, also known as "Nisei", and were members of the 298th and 299th Hawaiian Territorial Guard, were disarmed. They were reassembled into a new unit comprised of 1,400 Nisei. In June, 1942, they were secretly shipped to San Francisco and on to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin with a new identity as the 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate) and also became known in Hawaii as "One Puka Puka" battalion. Puka in Hawaiian is hole, and represented the zeros in 100. During their training they received a superior rating in their field performances and on the drill ground.

On Feb. 1943, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was established. Except for mainly Caucasian officers, it was composed of Nisei: 1,500 volunteers from the 10 concentration camps in the U.S. and 2,600 were selected out of 10,000 volunteers from Hawaii. They were assembled in Camp Shelby, Mississippi where they trained until June 1944. Of my seven brothers that volunteered only three were selected: Mitsuo, and Kazuyoshi, Company H and F of the 2nd Battalion, and David, 522nd Field Artillery Battalion, Battery B.

In the fall of 1943, the 100th Infantry Battalion met their incoming brothers (Nisei) of the newly formed 442nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT) as they transited through Camp Shelby, Mississippi on their way to Oran, North Africa. The 100th Infantry Battalion became part of the 34th Infantry Division and landed in Salerno, Italy on Sept. 26, 1943. They fought their way through Cassino and on to Rome. On June 10, 1944, they became part of the 442nd RCT. During the nine month campaign from Sept. 1943 to June of 1944, the 100th Infantry Battalion became known as the "purple heart" battalion because of their high rate of casualties.

After training, the 442nd RCT was shipped to Oran, North Africa and Anzio, Italy on June 2, 1944. On June 10th at Civitavecchia, North of Rome, the 100th Infantry Battalion became the 1st Battalion of the 442nd RCT and retained their 100th Infantry Battalion designation because of their proven combat valor. As a 442nd RCT/100 Infantry Battalion, they fought their way through northern Italy and on Sept. 26\ 1944, they landed in Marseille, France and fought their way and liberated the town of Bruyeres, France. On Oct. 30, 1944, they rescued the "Lost Battalion", 141st Infantry Regiment of the 36th "Texas" Infantry Division. As the result of this three day battle, they suffered 800 casualties to rescue about 211 men.

The 522nd Field Artillery Battalion was assigned to many different units as they continued into Germany and reached Dachau when the war ended. The 442nd RCT recuperated in Southern France until the unit regained their strength. On Mar. 25, 1945, the 442nd RCT secretly returned to Italy under the command of Gen. Mark Clark. They fought their way through the Gothic Lines and towards the Po River until the war ended on May 2nd, 1945.

The 442nd RCT/100 Infantry Battalion is the most decorated unit of its size in the history of the U.S. Army. They received over 19,000 medals and citations. Some of which are: 7 Presidential Unit Citations, 21 Medal of Honor, 30 Distinguish Service Cross, 560 Silver Star with 28 oak leaf clusters, over 6,000 Bronze Star and oak leaf clusters, over 9,500 Purple Hearts and many more.

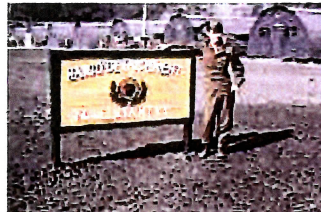
On Nov. 1, 1941, a secretly formed Military Intelligence Service Language School (MISLS) was created at Crissy Fields in Presidio of San Francisco to study and learn the Japanese language and military terminology. After Dec. 7, 1941, the need for more students was required and they moved to Camp Savage and later to Camp Snelling, both in Minnesota, to accommodate the increased number of students. During WW II, about 6,000 Nisei graduated. They served as interpreters, interrogators, and translators in every combat area in the China, Burma, Aleutian, and Pacific Theater. Overall 33,000 Nisei soldiers served in the Armed Forces during WW II

In spite of the repressive and punitive treatments of the AJAs during WW II by the government of the United States, the heroic deeds of the Nisei soldiers were finally recognized. On Nov. 2,



2011, the United States Congress bestowed the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest award Congress can give a fellow citizen, to the 442nd RCT/100 Infantry Battalion and the Military Intelligence Service, at the Nation's Capitol.

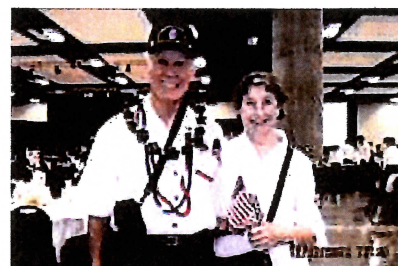
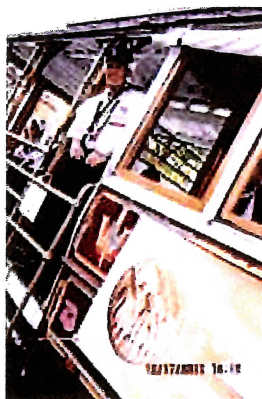
Of my four brothers who served in the armed forces in WW II, three, Mitsuo, Kazuyoshi, and David served with the 442nd RCT, in Italy, France and Germany, another, Shizuo served with the 1399 Engineer Construction Battalion in Hawaii



and I, Walter, served with the Military Intelligence Service- 354 Hq. Intelligence Detachment in the Occupation of Japan.



I was honored to participate and represent myself and my brothers at the Congressional Gold Medal ceremony in November 2011. I received the bronze replica of the medal in Washington, D.C., while my brothers, Mitsuo, Kazuyoshi, and David received theirs posthumously. Shizuo was not eligible to receive the medal. On Dec. 17, 2011, I participated in the ceremony in Hawaii honoring, those recipients who could not attend the Washington, D.C. honors.



It was a momentous occasion and I will always cherish it.

December 7, 2012