

Cloak of Darkness

by Henry C. Woodrum



Destroyed Wheeler Field 19th Fighter Squadron hangar and aircraft, 7 Dec. 1941. (Photo National Air & Space Museum)

EARLY morning sunlight slanted through the windows of the first floor bay of the 500-man consolidated barracks, flooding into the big room. I heard minah birds squawking outside on the lawn. Yawning, I sat up in bed. I looked around to see only a few bunks occupied because most of the GIs headed for Honolulu at noon the day before, 6 December 1941, when the week-long island-wide alert ended. Then, in a flurry of activity, ground crews taxied all of the fighters from dispersed revetments to the camp and parked them wing-tip to wing-tip for protection against sabotage. Some of the planes parked on the ramp had been there several days, being held for Navy carrier movement to Midway, Wake, and Guam; and because of unknown delays in the Army/Navy movement plans, they were still there on 7 December.

I arrived in Hawaii in early September, stationed at Bellows Field, until I transferred to Wheeler on Monday, 1 December. Except for one day on KP, I spent most of that week taking aptitude tests to determine my job in the United States Army Air Forces.

Wheeler was the fighter base in the islands, with a lot of P-40s, some older P-36s, even some obsolete P-26s and a Martin B-12A or two. Nevertheless, they gave me all of the tests, for armorer, sheet-metal worker, aircraft mechanic, photography, even crew member positions, aerial gunner, and radio operator. Sometime within the next week I would get my assignment.

I transferred to Hawaii on a short discharge, leaving my stripes in the Infantry thinking I could pick up the few credits I needed to apply for Aviation Cadets by taking night courses at the University of Hawaii. I wanted to fly fighters. But regardless of what job they gave me, I needed pocket money as a private made only \$30 a month. I had contacted a local band leader who asked me to meet him in front of the barracks at 7:30, the morning of 7 December. He said he would stop on his way back to Honolulu after playing a dance at Halaewa Saturday night.

A job with his band meant some extra money, so I got up, shaved, showered, put on a set of fatigue pants and a

almost straight up. All around it, other aircraft became unrecognizable masses of swirling, orange flames. Further down the ramp to my left, a P-36 exploded, hurling flaming debris upon an operations tent which blossomed with petals of flame. A man ran from the tent, jumped into an old Plymouth but drove only a hundred feet or so before a strafing aircraft machine-gunned it into another flaming hunk of metal. The GI jumped out of the car, his clothes smoking, and ran into a building unharmed. I saw the explosion as the gasoline tank blew up but did not hear the sound over all of the combined noises of the continuing attack. Cinders and still-burning embers fell all around me.

Then came a new sound, a whooshing, hollow, cooing sound as a P-40 gear wheel and parts of its strut windmilled through the air overhead to land in the street where it took a 100-foot bounce, then another, and another, until it came to rest in a field near the fence along the Wahiawa highway.

A lull in the strafing pattern allowed me to look up and I glanced toward Pearl Harbor. Where clear sky appeared a few minutes earlier, towering columns of black smoke now arose from the Navy Base. As I watched, a huge explosion, bigger than all the others, formed a massive billow of smoke with angry curls of fire visible at its base.

Moments passed before the several-mile-long lag of rumbling sound reached me — a gigantic roar.

THE horror of the reality sickened me, once the surprise faded. I remembered the headlines of the local Honolulu newspapers of the past Saturday, 29 November: "Japanese May Strike Over Weekend," and another describing Karusu's stop in Honolulu while en route to Washington for peace talks only a few days before. I wondered how the United States, that big, strong, powerful country, could have allowed this to happen. I cursed, pounding the ground in frustration.

Someone called out, "You got any protection over there?"

"Yeah, I got a good pile of 2 x 4s. C'mon over."

Two men crawled around the end of a low stack of 1 x 12s, closer to the hangar. One of them lay behind me, hunkering up to the lumber, but the other, a skinny, crew-cut kid about 20 years old, crawled to the end of the pile with his upper body protruding beyond it, exposed.

"You better get back here, you'll get hit out there!" I said.

"Naw. I can see 'em coming from out here. I'm all right." He began to laugh, treating the newborn war as a joke, but a few minutes later he suddenly gasped and



More heaps of aircraft wreckage, 7 Dec. 1941, Wheeler Field. (Photo National Air & Space Museum)

rolled half over, his body rigid, quivering before he flopped back on his belly and died, gagging on upspoken words and blood, the toes of his shoes kicking bare places in the dirt alongside my head.

We tugged his body slowly back towards us, behind the lumber, protection he no longer needed. The dead body's muscles relaxed, emitting strange gurgling sounds. The smell of fresh, warm blood merged with other smells.

Two-seater dive-bombers, Aichi-99s, later commonly known as D-3A Vals, joined the circle of strafing fighters. Their rear cockpit gunners spotted us hiding in the lumber and from then on each gunner took pot shots at us as they pulled up from an altitude of 20 to 40 feet. I could see their faces, laughing gleefully as they hosed us good. Our haven became a turkey shoot. Bullets chewed the lumber around us. One man behind another pile got hit and another shouted, "It's too hot here for me," and took off running for the barracks, only 100 feet or so away. But as he reached the crest of the embankment, a line of slugs stitiched their way through the moist dirt to send him tumbling into a motionless heap at the bottom of the slope.

Another man gauged the separation of aircraft in the slot correctly and made it safely to the barracks. I crawled to the edge of the pile to crouch, waiting for the ship in the slot overhead to pass before I ran, moving so fast I almost stumbled down the slope, but I kept my balance and reached the building.

In the confusion and turmoil as guys dashed around the supply room, I helped myself to everything I needed — a World War I helmet, gas mask, bayonet and scabbard, canteen, cover and mess kit, first-aid pouch, cartridge belt and ammunition holder — everything but ammunition.

A skinny PFC who arrived at Wheeler with me stood behind the counter, pulling the Sunday duty in the supply room. He didn't know where they kept the key to the ammo locker, but everybody thought he did. They were chewing him out when a wild-eyed Staff Sergeant grabbed him by the front of his fatigue blouse, his right fist cocked and ready to fly as he shouted into the supply man's face to open the locker.

"I told you. I don't have a key. I'd give it to you if I did."

I went to the rifle rack and grabbed a Springfield .03, then walked to the doorway when I saw a Tech Sergeant talking with several men.

"Sergeant," I interrupted, "can you get me some ammo? I've got everything else I need."

He looked me over for a moment.

"You ever fire this piece?"

"I just came from two years in the Infantry."

"OK. You show these guys how it works. I'll get the ammo." He walked quickly away as I turned to the other men, five of them.

"You never fired a Springfield?" Stoney-faced, they shook their heads. Aircraft mechanics, they had never trained on rifles. I showed them the cut-off, the safety, and how to load — but especially the safety. They each went through it a few times before the non-com came back lugging a case of ammo. Someone had opened the locker with a sledge and a hacksaw.

"Get this thing open!"

One of the mechanics pulled a pair of pliers and a

screwdriver from his pockets, punched a hole in the tin lid with a screwdriver, then used the pliers to peel it open like a can of sardines. It was full of loose ammunition, none in clips. We filled our pockets and the magazines of the .03s, every round a tracer, the bullet red-tipped.

Across the street, the next to the last hangar burned fiercely. Drifting smoke was getting thicker and blowing our way as aircraft noise diminished. We all began talking at once but with too much to say, we fell silent again, until finally, one of the mechanics asked, "Did you see what happened down at Pearl?"

"They got the *Arizona*."

"How do you know?"

Someone just back from town said the *Arizona* got hit just as he passed the harbor. Another battleship blew up about the same time and just rolled over with only the bottom sticking out of the water.

We stood there silently for a moment or two before one of the guys gave a long, incredulous whistle, as if he didn't want to believe it, but did.

We looked across the airfield through the smoke from the mess of burning aircraft junk towards the harbor where towering columns of black smoke merged into one gigantic blotch. No one spoke. We just stood there, watching silently, wondering, beginning to figure our chances, knowing things looked bad.

Nearby, I saw and heard other men whose closest friends were suddenly and shockingly dead. They walked around in profound helplessness, dazed, enraged, and shouting, or mentally berserk and deathly quiet, but each of them driven by one thought — revenge. It hit the old timers the worst, I thought, as I watched the face of a First Sergeant, dressed in fresh khakis as he strode past us, hands clenched into fists, his eyes staring, unseeing, tears streaming down his face as he muttered an endless string of curses because he somehow thought it was all his fault.

"I shoulda been here," he shouted. But he headed inside to take charge and start organizing things.

The Tech Sergeant came back, his rifle slung over his shoulder.

"C'mon," he said.

We went to set up guard along the road. The Japs were gone and he thought there was no telling what would happen next.

I realized he was right. It was now quiet, the planes gone. We followed the Sergeant down the steps. The body of the GI still lay at the foot of the slope. Medics picked up the body of the kid in the lumber as I watched. The GIs in our group began talking quietly among themselves. When the Sergeant called to me I ran up to walk with him. I saw no vehicles on the main boulevard, but in front of the barracks, a group of wives helped with the wounded. The women looked as worn as we did.

Most of them wore jeans and sweatshirts with their hair tied up in scarves or tucked under baseball caps. One woman who seemed to be in charge, wore what looked like the tops of her husbands pajamas. I was amazed at their quick reaction and proud, for they worked hard, doing things needed, really helping. Servicemen's wives are pretty tough people. Down in the next block on Santos Dumont Avenue, a line of wounded men began to form in front of the dispensary, their arms in slings and heads and faces wrapped in bloody, temporary bandages.

Bodies of some of our dead GIs, already hastily gath-

ered by other GIs, lay side by side on the lawn, blankets covering all but their feet, toes pointed upward, some naked, some in boots or garrison shoes. Ambulances arrived from Schofield Hospital. A few angry voices rose above the quiet talk from small groups.

We trotted across the street through a vacant lot bordered by tall eucalyptus trees which rustled noisily in a light breeze, passing the P-40 wheel that had whistled over my head earlier, a forlorn reminder of the wrath of the attack. When we reached Wahiawa Road, MPs came roaring en masse from Schofield on motorcycles to patrol the highway, the only traffic on the road except a lone taxi full of GIs coming back from Honolulu. A big paunchy, red-faced guy in civies leaned out of the cab and shouted, "How'd the 24th make out? I'm the First Sergeant."

"Don't know, Sarge."

He moved back into the cab, afraid of what he might find when he reached his barracks.

Later, I heard a rumor that someone shot an MP off his motorbike near the front gate, apparently unwilling to pass up such a chance for revenge. A lot of guys hated certain MPs with a passion. There were no Japanese in the area at the time. But it was never confirmed; there were lots of rumors.

The Tech Sergeant leading our group posted men along the road."

"Don't let anybody pass until you identify them as an officer or GI," he said.

They nodded, dropping off at each spot, saying nothing, already looking for cover. Together, the Sergeant and I walked further up the fence until we reached a point opposite a dead-end street in the Officers Housing Area

where a little, three-strand, barbed-wire gate in the fence provided access. We used to call them "go-to-hell" gates on the ranches at home.

"What did you say your name is?"

"Woodrum."

"OK, Woodrum. Mine's Henderson. You stay with me. You may have showed those guys how to fire an .03 but I don't want any antsy mechanic around me when it starts again." He was a husky man in his early forties with a leathery face and a quiet air of assurance.

We sat down under a big banyan tree and lit cigarettes. It was quiet and undisturbed there in the shade at the edge of the airfield; there was still dew on the grass at our feet and I relaxed a little, allowing myself to think aloud.

"It's a hell of a way to start a war, isn't it, Sarge."

"Yeah. We lost a lot of men. Washington is gonna hafta let us fight now; the days of politickin' are over."

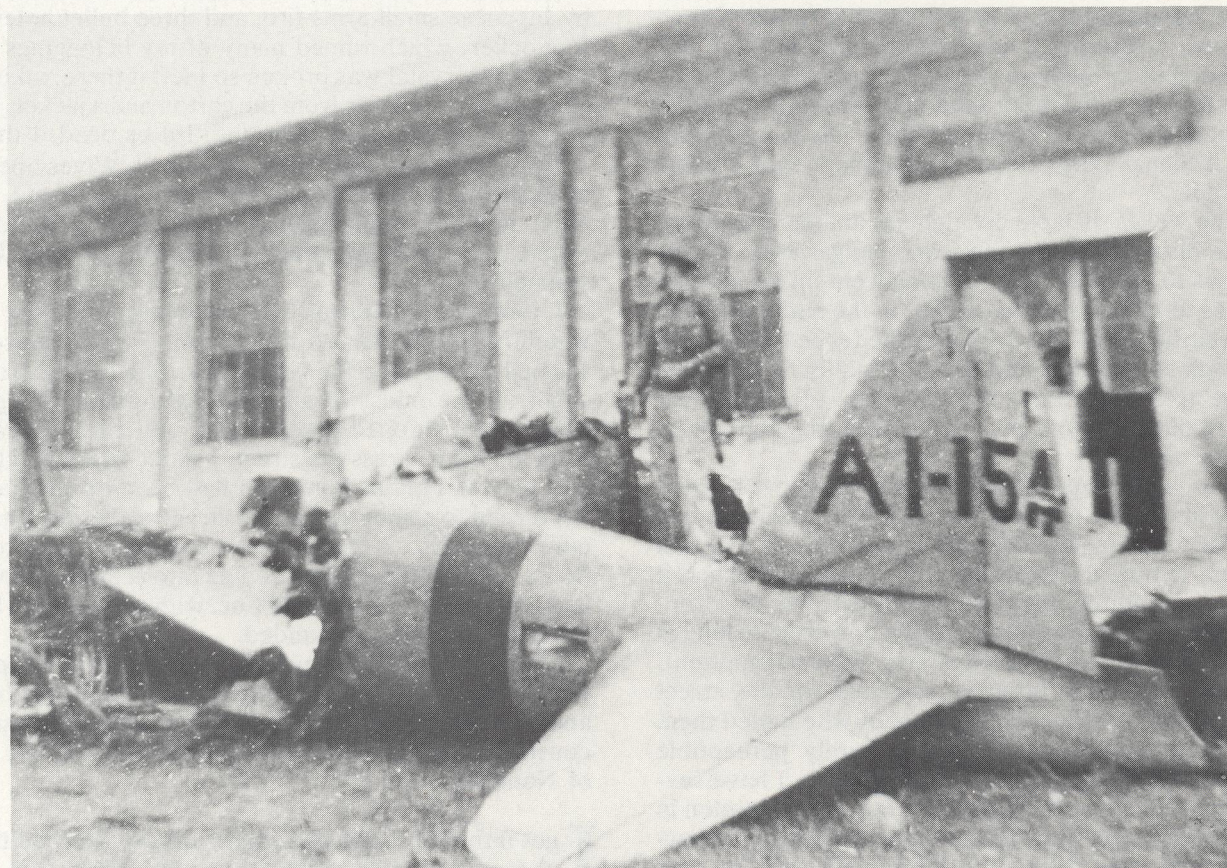
A sound like 50 high-speed freight trains roaring simultaneously arose, turned into a harsh, whistling roar, then trailed off into a moment of near silence before a geyser of water erupted from Wahiawa reservoir across the road, hurling water and mud in all directions.

"What was that?"

"Artillery, kid. That's the Navy shelling the Japs but that shell wasn't fused. They must be trying to shoot them down point blank with cannon."

ON the firing end of artillery as early as 1935 at Fort Ord, I had never been this close to the point of a shell landing. Other shells screeched low over my head.

Three planes suddenly swooped in from the south. They nosed down as they neared us, the leader strafing the



This Japanese aircraft — a Mitsubishi A6M Zero — shot down on 7 Dec. 1941 during the first wave, crashed at Schofield Barracks. (Courtesy Arthur Wynant Collection)

street ahead of us a half-block away. We saw his tracers plow up tufts in the asphalt and then for the first time I saw a group of small kids standing along the street and on the sidewalk where they must have been playing, watching the plane as Henderson and I blasted away faster than I ever fired before. I saw our tracers red-line their way into the nose of the fuselage as the pilot started to pull up after strafing the kids, then lost sight of him behind the trees.

"I got off three rounds," said Henderson.

"Me, too," I said.

Other planes made passes over the field as bigger bombs from high-flying bombers exploded along the ramp. As more Zeros strafed the area, I ran down the street and gathered the kids. They smiled at me, laughing, enjoying the show, but they didn't protest when I herded them through the front door of the nearest house where a very defiant woman soon confronted me, shouting until I interrupted her.

"Lady, there's a war going on. The Japs blew up the whole base and they just strafed the kids in the street out front. Keep them inside. I've got to get back to my post."

She stared at me, but as I started for the door, a man standing in a bathrobe on the landing of the stairs, shouted.

"What did you say?"

Mechanically his hands fumbled with the belt of the robe as I told him again about the attack. Apparently, he had slept through the entire blitz, but as I left he began organizing things for a quick departure.

As I ran back to Henderson, two more planes strafed the street and he got off a couple of more shots. Two others tangled in the dogfight — a Jap fighter that Henderson said was the one we fired at, the other a P-40. Soon, the Japanese plane crashed, leaving smoke billowing upward, triggering a cheer from hundreds of GIs around that part of the base. Moments later another Japanese crashed near the front gate and across the road in Wahiawa, and big cheer went up again. The word we got was that a Signal Corps Second Lieutenant shot it down with a BAR.

Sporadic waves of Japanese fighters and bombers continued the blitz against the ramp and hangar area, too far away for us to shoot at. The bombing went on for another 20 minutes, during which the officer in the bathrobe I had talked to earlier drove his car up to the fence for us to let him through so that he could take the family to Schofield where we told him things were quieter. He asked our names and outfits before he left, his wife thanking me as they pulled away.

Just then, a big, four-engined bomber flew over, about 1,000 feet above the ground, and GIs began firing at it. I hollered for them to stop because I had seen one like it in the States. It was an American B-17. Later, I learned it came from Hamilton Field in California and was supposed to land at Hickam but instead, it now tried to land at Wheeler under fire from American GIs. What a reception!

A group of GIs in fatigues marched up the street towards us, led by a Second Lieutenant who halted them near us. The Sergeant gave him a barely perceptible salute and said, "Good morning, Lieutenant. I have several men posted along the highway. Nobody has gotten in yet." He explained what he did noncommittally, knowing he did the right thing. The Lieutenant said his men would take over from us, and told us to report to another

officer down the block in another house.

We walked together to the place being used as a command post. It was on a cul-de-sac and as we approached the rear of the house, a young woman poked her head from the kitchen door and said, "Come in. I've got coffee and sandwiches if you haven't eaten."

I walked through the kitchen into the living room and sat down on a sofa. The nearest thing to home since I had been in the Army. I lit a cigarette as she brought us coffee on a tray and was already drinking it when a radio somewhere in the room suddenly blared out, "Angels eight, Barbers Point. Many bogies in sight — closing." We all became motionless in the room, listening until the unknown pilot's voice spoke again. "Disregard. They're ours — Navy."

The woman said the man we had heard was a Captain who lived just down the street who took off from Dillingham, an auxiliary field near Haleiwa on the north shore. Other broadcasts from pilots indicated the Japanese were withdrawing, she said. Another radio tuned to a Honolulu broadcast station spewed out a frantic voice describing carnage at various bases around the island. I drank the coffee, smoked another cigarette, and ate a sandwich, trying to relax, but with a guilty feeling, knowing I ought to be somewhere else, doing something worthwhile.

A little later, a Captain came back from the main base and ordered us back to a check-in point in front of my barracks. We walked through backyards and across front lawns, taking short cuts to quickly reach the barracks. The lawn outside my bay, where the minah birds squawked earlier, was littered with debris. Inside, I found tufts of stuffing protruding from my mattress made by Japanese small-arms fire, and three bullet holes in my footlocker, which ruined many of my belongings inside. My watch crystal was broken so I left it there, taking only two packs of Luckies from the carton and a jacket. If I had stayed in the sack that morning, I'd be dead, I thought.

Outside, things were more organized. Wives operated a makeshift kitchen serving coffee and doughnuts. At another table, a young woman issued two packs of cigarettes, scrounged from the damaged PX, to every GI who stopped.

I took the cigarettes she gave me, standing alone, watching as she served other men. Her presence there seemed wrong, like the whole day. She looked fresh and clean, in the midst of all that destruction with guys in fatigues, or stripped to the waist, still carting dead men from the lawn across the street. I spoke to her and learned that the 6th Pursuit Squadron had been hit the hardest.

I turned to glance across the street at the remains of the 6th's barracks. A bomb had blown apart the top two floors, turning the entire building into rubble. GIs worked in the debris on the ground floor, with ambulances backed up, waiting to load wounded.

I looked back at the girl, thinking about the Japanese, wondering when they would come back to hit the beaches and why they weren't doing it already. For the first time I considered all the possibilities, remembering the stories of Nanking.

I got into ranks with the others and we shuffled through the motions like automatons. My adrenaline supply had been pumped dry during the attack.



Another view of the Zero that crashed at Schofield, 7 Dec. 1941. Three men checking the wreckage are wearing WWI equipment, except for the gas mask, which was a newer issue. (Courtesy Arthur Wynant Collection)

We marched past burned-out hangars along the flight line. Fire trucks still pumped water, the smell of char strong in the air. Beyond them, I saw smouldering hulks of wrecked aircraft and wondered how many of them could fly. Here and there, in long lines, GI's were stripped to the waist, passing salvaged material out, hand over hand to the ramp where they stacked it to dry.

Two rows ahead of me I spotted a guy from Bellows named House who came over on the USAT *Clevedon* with me in August. He and two others were cited for the Silver Star for an almost impossible effort defending their barracks.

On the ramp, mechanics wearing gloves removed parts from aircraft still too hot to touch bare-handed. A truck nosed slowly past us until it partially blocked our way. A Captain jumped down from the cab. Dressed in fatigues and needing a shave, he looked tough enough to lick any man in the outfit. He shouted, "Halt those troops, Sergeant," his voice angry and loud. Later, I learned the Japanese shot an airplane out from under him as he taxied, preventing him from getting off the ground on the day he had trained for all his adult life.

Two GIs in the back of the truck passed out two bandoliers of ammunition per man, a lot more-than we expected. I wondered if the Japanese were already on the beaches. Everyone glanced speculatively from one face to the next, wanting to ask, but keeping silent. Before we moved out again, the Captain gave us the word.

"We have reports of paratroopers landing in the area north of Barber's Point. Their jump suits are similar to ours, a light blue in color with a big red ink disk on their

chest. They ought to be good targets. Your job is to keep them off the base. Any questions?"

We glanced at each other again, hoping someone else would ask the questions we all wanted answers to.

The NCO marched us down the street past the wrecked Air Corps Supply building. Its roof was blasted away in places, the walls splintered, and smoke-blackened, and I saw big holes at the far end. We went through Kunia Gate then turned into the scrub at the edge of a big gully overlooking pineapple and cane fields stretching for miles toward the harbor.

We piled our gear, stripped off our shirts, and began to dig foxholes and machine-gun nests where they told us to, eight of us working together. Easy to dig at first, it became hard work after we got through the top layer of Wheeler red dirt to reach hardened layers with more rocks. I began to get blisters as sweat mixed with red dust turned to liquid mud dripping from my body. As the long afternoon wore on, they robbed my detail of men until only two of us remained, myself and another guy, because we were both qualified on machine-guns; but by then, we were nearly finished.

Hot in the sun, I was hungry again, but with only a little warm water to drink, I rationed myself, sipping sparingly. Finally, the Sergeant came back with two guys lugging a pot full of warm, canned pork and beans and a jug of coffee. We filled one of our canteens with coffee. As we sat there eating, the NCO told us to finish as soon as possible because it would be dark shortly. We would stay there to man the gun.

Before he left, the NCO told us about a Staff Sergeant,

in the guardhouse for being AWOL, the only prisoner behind bars that day. Captain Campbell, the Provost Marshal, left a machine-gun mounted on the guardhouse roof when the alert ended Saturday. When the Japanese hit, the Sergeant talked the one guard on duty at the guardhouse into letting him out to go up on the roof to shoot back. It was the first machine-gun to return fire because the guard went with him. They got one Japanese confirmed and damaged others. I got a kick out of that story.

"You two got the first shift," he said, "sunset till midnight."

We sat on the mound of earth and the rim of sandbags, watching the black smoke rise over Pearl Harbor, the fresh smell of the fields clean and crisp. The broad expanse of green pineapple plants, each row separated by rich, red, plowed earth, sloped abundantly away to eventually merge with the rippling swells of taller cane fields which spread for miles before us. Every once in awhile I could see flames shoot upward beneath the columns of smoke from the Harbor followed by the sound of explosions, accidental or purposefully detonated — I didn't know which.

We heard no noise on the airbase behind and to our left, and we began to feel shut off from everything, isolated, wondering again. We went back to work, finishing up by setting out firing stakes, stopping only then. I looked around at the security of our entrenchment, satisfied.

When a man is on his own, with nothing to do, he gets bored just sitting around, especially if he's a GI, waiting for orders. Now, we waited, and speculated on what was happening. The Sergeant felt the same way, I guess, because when he came back up the gulch from the other sites, he seemed jumpy and in a hurry to go. He paused only long enough to call out to us, "The Command Post is in a field across the road from the gate. You're here till midnight. I'll see you later," and trotted away.

I checked the machine-gun, in place and ready, all set to go, with plenty of ammunition handy. A Browning of the same model I had fired in the 1st Infantry, it was a good gun. I did well with it just shooting at targets and wondered if I would do as well aiming at those red disks. I didn't think I'd have a problem. A good gunner can make a Browning talk if they are in good condition, and the gun-metal blueness of this one gleamed like new. It traversed easily as we moved it horizontally along the cane atop the other bank, or downward, into the depths of the gully.

"I wish about ten guys with blue suits and red disks would walk out of that cane right now," I said, looking down the barrel towards the cane.

"It'll be night if they come," my partner said. "We won't see very well, then."

"Yeah, I know."

I turned to stare into the gathering darkness towards Pearl Harbor where diminishing fires glowed in the fading light.

I remembered visiting Pearl Harbor to see two guys from my hometown, both Marines, just eight days ago, wondering if they were all right now, already knowing that many of the capital ships of the Pacific Fleet wallowed in the mud of the shallow harbor. I supposed men were trapped inside and wondered if they would get out. Unknown to me, divers were even then busily cutting into

steel hulls to free the living trapped within. Their tapings still gave hope to those alive inside who answered with faint tapings of their own, until finally, the sounds faded away as death overtook them in the silent darkness beneath the water.

When these efforts were described to me later, I thought these workers had the toughest job of anyone on the island that night. But the medics had it tough, too, for there were a lot of badly wounded and dead servicemen.

Just then, at full dusk, when the mountains were only a faint silhouette in the darker than mauve evening sky, I began to realize what had happened: we were alone with much of our force destroyed, and the nearest help available was 2,000 miles away, back in the States, too far to reach Hawaii in time.

AS it grew darker, time seemed to drag. Swarms of mosquitoes came out, and we draped our blankets over our heads. Unable to smoke, I wished I had never formed the habit. A sip of cold coffee did not relieve the dryness of my mouth.

All over the island, men sat in the darkness, wondering what was going to happen, thinking that whatever did happen might be worse than what they already had experienced. Our thoughts raced, over the cane fields and through time, space, and distance to little towns across America where we knew our families were facing the same kind of nagging questions, wondering if we were still alive. The unanswered questions and the boredom of nothing to do but wait combined with the darkness of night to create the worst foe of all — apprehension. It was as if a cloak of darkness had settled over all our lives to eliminate awareness, assurance, and the security of orderly existence; we realized now that the word we had been given was wrong. Our invincible stronghold, this bastion of our defense in the mid-Pacific, was virtually helpless.

I fought the apprehension as did the other guy. Our eyes tried to pierce the blackness with every sound that reached us from the gully or the fields beyond. We visualized the appearance of a red meatball on a blue background, but realized colors could not be distinguished, only shapes at close range. We wanted something to happen — anything.

The long night wore on. We heard shots, from the airfield and from further away, and that made us wonder. Yet stillness surrounded our site. About eleven o'clock it seemed as if every gun and every ship afloat opened up on an aircraft overhead. Tracers formed an hourglass shape of criss-crossing red lines in the sky, trapping the aircraft at its intersection, turning it into burning waste which tumbled earthward. That relieved the tension because we thought it was a Japanese aircraft. But the next day we heard it had been a B-18 from Hickam.

Finally, a Corporal came down from the Command Post, calling to us as he approached in the darkness, afraid we might blast away, I guess. He gave the password, and two guys slid into the nest with us. The Corporal carried a flashlight with a blue lens.

"What's the blue lens for?"

"They say pilots can't see blue light from altitude," he said.

"Oh."

"Seen anything at all?"

"No."

We briefed our relief, then left with the Corporal.

We followed him over the crest, crossed the road, and went to the far edge of a field to a truck parked under a tree, with a canvas fly rigged up to prevent any light from escaping from within where cooks worked over a field range. The cook fed us bacon, eggs, hot coffee, and toast. I squatted down outside to eat, barely able to see the food. I could hear the voices of the guys in the tent, a low murmur of unintelligible sounds. After I finished eating, I sat down with my back against a tree, aching, dog-tired.

Over on the ramp, frequent rifle fire prompted one guy to say, "Boy, I'd sure hate to be the OD tonight." Somebody else said, "I heard footsteps on the ramp while I was sitting in a truck, then a shot, and then some guard hollered, 'Halt!'"

It didn't get much of a laugh.

In the night, apprehension took over completely when someone thought he saw a Japanese, then, *sure* he saw a Japanese, fired. Suddenly, everyone else thought they saw the enemy, too, and sporadic firing broke out followed by a long continuous wave of rifle fire as everyone in the whole Wheeler-Schofield perimeter fired simultaneously. Thousands of rounds, some tracers, hurtled through the night, arching harmlessly into empty fields, seeking nothing, serving only to ease the tension. One GI sitting near me got up as moonlight broke through clouds momentarily to walk to the edge of the field where he held his rifle up at a 45° angle and fired it into the night. When he came back he sat down again.

"Been wanting to fire that thing all day long," he said. No one said a thing, but an NCO snorted disgustedly.

I didn't really blame the guy. Some men were still numb, embraced in the shock of unseen, psychic wounds, bearing not even a scar to exhibit as a badge of courage or of valor. With friends in their barracks just that morning, dressed in Class As and ready to go on pass, they watched their buddies turned into grotesque shapes of agony. At first, they thought it horseplay, but became conscious stricken at the sight of mortal wounds and went to their aid, only to have these friends die in their arms without ever getting one second to convert from peace to war. Now, they brooded sullenly, deeply troubled, thinking it unfair because we were not at war, not yet knowing that war is never fair. More than anything else, they wanted revenge.

I asked someone for the word but no one offered anything new, just that they expected the Japanese to return. I hunkered down trying to sleep wrapped in a blanket. A light, misty rain began to fall. On the narrow-gauge railroad tracks running through the fields, a locomotive pulling a few cars chugged its way heavily into a siding. It stopped clear of the highway as armed guards jumped down, calling to each other before telling us they saw no Japanese on the way from Honolulu, then marching up the street to Wing Headquarters. The Hawaiian train crew stayed in the cab, afraid to leave for fear of being mistaken for Japanese. Another guy and I took them coffee.

MINUTES passed and I almost slept, resting again against the tree, suspended in a sort of limbo. A loud hissing sound pierced the night, bringing me suddenly awake when someone shouted at the top of his lungs, "Gas, Gas!"

I ripped open the cover of my mask, trying to get it on without taking another breath but couldn't, gulping air once more before I secured it. The men around me looked strange in the night with bulging eyepieces and dangling superficial throats. A non-com came back from investigating, ripped off his mask, and shouted, "Take 'em off. It's just that damned engine letting off steam."

Everyone cursed the train crew.

A little later, a Command car came through the gate to park at the edge of the field. Several men climbed down and began walking towards us, a man in the center obviously the leader. I faced directly toward them as they approached and seeing the glitter of rank on the officer's shoulder, started to come to attention, but the man held out his hand, palm outward, and said, "At ease, men, at ease." Someone came out of the cook tent with a blue flashlight and I saw stars on the shoulders.

It was General Davidson, Senior Army Air Corps officer in the Hawaiian Command. He had been placed in charge of the Aircraft Control Center in addition to being the Pursuit Wing Commander.

The General told us that we were going to be all right even though we took a beating. He didn't think the Japanese would return, but we would be more ready for them if they did. With General Davidson were three pilots who had gotten off the ground — a Lieutenant Taylor and Lieutenant Welch, who got several Japanese between them, and a Lieutenant Rasmussen, who got one too, almost over the base. Altogether, our pilots shot down seven.

"How many Japanese were there, Lieutenant?," one NCO asked.

"I got into three bunches of 15 or so but I think there must have been 200 or more altogether."

We all began asking questions then. The General stood back listening, interjecting occasionally, watching as we began to relax a little, the main reason he brought them out, I guess. The pilots answered all our questions and said they would be up again at dawn. Other planes were ready, too. Mechanics were working on some in one of the hangars blacked out with tarps and plywood.

Welch and Taylor were relatively new pilots, which surprised me. They said they took off from the auxiliary field at Haleiwa where they took gunnery training all week; that explained why their planes were fully armed and ready. They drove to the field from Wheeler in a convertible, under fire part of the way.

Finally, the General told us there were other people to see before the pilots could sleep. They walked back to the command car and drove away. I couldn't sleep or even try so I went back to the mess tent for more coffee. A guy came back from the main base with a battery-powered radio.

"What's the news?"

"Nothing but the war."

"Have they declared it yet?"

"No, but it won't be long now."

He switched on a local station. They were re-broadcasting Webley Edwards' first broadcast back to the States. Emotion was packed into every word. I wondered how it would affect the folks back home. Changed a little since morning, some of the damage went unmentioned. As the playback ended, the announcer said they would

switch to KPO in San Francisco for a resume of the news in the States.

Men sitting off in the darkness gathered near the truck as the guy set the radio on an old crate, turning it until the antenna faced in just the right direction for maximum signal strength. We hunched over in the mist, waiting for the word. To me KPO meant San Francisco, and that meant home, or close to it. There was another short announcement, modified even more, censorship already underway. Then KPO came on. First came the three-note chime, the same one I heard every night at home, followed by station identification. I felt a little shiver just knowing it still existed.

We listened, hushed at the nation's reaction to the sneak attack, described first from New York, then Chicago, St. Louis, Denver, and finally, San Francisco. We realized they were getting few facts, just that we were attacked and everyone back home was mad. Finally, they switched to Washington, D.C., to hear the President address Congress. When Roosevelt came on, his voice sounded much the same as ever but rung with emotion as he described the day's events and announced his intention to ask for a declaration of war.

"You mean they ain't declared it yet?," someone said.

Two guys pounded on him as everybody yelled, "Shut up!"

More followed, and the words "Day of Infamy" became etched in my memory forever; Roosevelt ended by saying that he had already appointed General MacArthur as Commander of all U.S. Forces in the Philippines. An old Tech Sergeant pounded a fist into his palm and said, "Well, that's one thing, by God. At least they finally gave him back his rank."

"Who's General MacArthur?" a yardbird asked.

"Who's General MacArthur? Where you been, kid?"

"You mean you never heard of General MacArthur? Everybody's heard of him."

But the old timers were wrong. There were a lot of us who hadn't — then.

JUST before I was supposed to go back to the machine-gun, sporadic firing broke out north of us toward the mountains. Soon we heard the faint sounds of engines and instinct told us the Japanese were returning.

The men around the cook tent became alert immediately and peered into the darkness. All we could see were a few tracers. But the sounds of engines grew louder as firing began from somewhere much closer to us along the Schofield perimeter. Finally we saw the exhaust flames of aircraft down low, moving very fast towards us.

Two of our own .50-caliber machine-gun positions north of the highway began chattering away as several planes swept low overhead and continued on, but further back, in a momentary glimmer of moonlight, we had a glimpse of an aircraft as it began to slowly roll over before it nosed down into the pineapple patch. A horrendous thumping sound filled the air as the engine sound stopped abruptly. The aircraft skidded through the soft earth of the field as a second aircraft crashed somewhere farther up the gully. It began to skid, shredding parts and pieces here and there until it pitched up and came to rest in the pineapple field not far from the highway, lying almost upside down near the edge of the gully.

We all started running towards the crash sites. When

we reached the plane in the gully we found it almost on its back. The canopy was smashed and the pilot hung suspended through the opening. As each man arrived at the site he stopped abruptly, immediately seeing the insignia on the fuselage and tail which identified the plane as U.S. Navy. Several men eased the pilot from the aircraft and laid him down. They felt for a pulse but couldn't be sure if he was alive or not.

Others raced on toward the second plane. It was Navy also, and its pilot was obviously dead. They carried the two pilots to the highway to wait for the ambulance, but both pilots were DOA at the hospital.

Most of us did a little clean-up around the aircraft but departed when regular crash crew personnel arrived to prevent any fires from breaking out.

One of our two gunners was sure he had shot down at least one of the two planes. He had been morose and withdrawn all day, having seen a couple of his close friends killed during the first instant of the sneak attack, before they ever got out of their room in the barracks. All day long he had wanted to kill Japanese so badly that when the chance came, he took advantage of it. When they finally told him the plane he shot down was American, he fell apart.

GIs guarded both aircraft until daylight. We were told the incident wasn't our fault as the incoming aircraft had fired no recognition signals. But none of us felt any better.

About two o'clock I went back to the machine-gun site, with a different guy this time. The night seemed darker than ever, and the light intermittent rain continued. But the mosquitoes were gone and I used the blanket for warmth. The damp wool emitted a musty odor.

The guns around the harbor spoke twice more within the next hour with no visible effect. My post seemed even more isolated in the misty darkness at the edge of the gully where it remained deathly quiet and still. Once I heard an aircraft engine start, then roar briefly in the night. There was little shouting now and no rattle of rifle fire. The other guy and I remained silent, alone with our thoughts. Another aircraft engine started, running smoothly for a moment before it stopped abruptly. At three-thirty, the NCOIC came down the ridge to the gun site. He carried a thermos jug of hot coffee and we sat there with him, asking if there were any more reports of paratroopers landing anywhere on the islands. He said no. I wrapped my hands around the aluminum cap for warmth, unable to see him in what seemed to be the blackest part of the night so far, talking only to the darkness instead, and hearing his replies.

The coffee invigorated me, and after the Sergeant left I felt better. When they come back, I thought, I'll at least have something to shoot with that can really do some damage if they fly as low as they did this morning.

Behind us, trucks began moving through Kunia Gate. I could hear them but couldn't see anything. Probably infantry from Schofield, I thought.

My boredom was still there but the apprehension was long gone. I wondered what would happen at dawn and began to look forward to it. I wanted the long, cold, dismal night to be over, as if its end would ease our problems, though thinking the reverse more likely.

Again, I thought about the situation that led me to take the short discharge and come to Hawaii with the hope of getting into Aviation Cadets, wanting to be a pilot, hoping

to be a fighter pilot, yet here in a machine-gun nest.

Somewhere, an aircraft engine sputtered again, coughed once, then almost stopped before it surged into a steady hum. As it continued, others joined it, their sound reverberating through the gullies and over the plains around the field. I wondered why so many were cranking up in darkness, and glanced toward the Wainai range, trying to decide if I really saw a faint outline of the rugged peaks, or if my imagination played tricks on me. Then the engine sounds began to move and I realized aircraft were being taxiied along the ramp. I glanced again at the mountains where their outline was now faintly visible as a darker silhouette against the deepest mauve of first light.

I heard the fighters stop, knowing they were parked at the end of the runway to make their final cockpit checks and engine run-ups. I wondered what their pilots were thinking as they checked their ships. I was sure they were as eager to get back into the blue as the young guys I had met during the night. They could hardly wait, but they might have the whole Japanese Navy to face. I could see the shapes of things now for it was rapidly growing lighter.

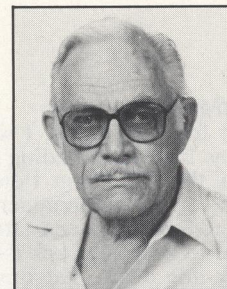
Then the full-throated roar of takeoff power flooded the dawn as sunlight glittered over the peaks, washing the night away from the fields, but leaving the gullies beneath us in deep, wavering shadows.

In the distance, the P-40s broke into clear view above the faint horizon, climbing into the sun, stacks glowing. The flight commander turned back towards the field, still climbing as other ships joined the formation during the turn, then another until there were six. Only six. I

counted again to make sure. Nearing the field they nosed down over the ramp in a tight, six-ship pass, veering away and upward as they passed our position, their red, white, and blue markings clearly visible.

There was a tightness in my throat and I felt proud, even if there were only six, because they were ours. I sat back in the dugout to wonder and wait again, the blue steel of the old Browning cold under my palms, happy the long night was finally over.

H. C. Woodrum was appointed an aviation cadet and returned to the States in June 1942, graduating in class 43-D at Stockton, CA. Thereafter, he was assigned to the 9th Air Force, where he flew 35 missions in a B-25 Marauder, *The Shopworn Angel*. Ten days before D-Day, he was shot down over the outskirts of Paris and spent the next 90 days with the French underground; he returned to London following the Liberation of Paris. He flew the Berlin Airlift and served in Japan before his retirement from the Air Force as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1964. Subsequently, he was Emergency Services Coordinator of Shasta County, CA, and Executive Director of the Shasta-Trinity County Medical Society. His last position was Director of Airports, City of Redding, CA. A graduate of Stockton College, his published articles have dealt with aviation and pioneer medical history in northern California.



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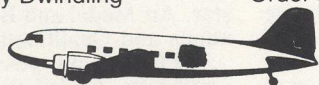
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