

ROOSEVELTS DAY OF INFAMY, MY DAY OF HELL

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BY

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THE RISING SUN OF JAPAN. . . . Japan is steeped in German ideas and regards war as an industry because from war she has secured all the extensions of her Empire. . . . She means to exploit China and build herself up until she becomes a power formidable to all the world. . . . (She will) threaten the safety of the world. . . . But the country that she would menace most would be our own, and unless we carefully maintain a very superior navy in the Pacific, the day will come when the United States will take the place of France in another great war to preserve civilization.

-Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, 1919

The violence, fury, skill, and might of Japan exceeded anything we had been led to expect.

-Winston Churchill

I took a swat at the damned mosquitos. No matter how vicious or how swiftly the hand moved, it interrupted the monotonous hum of the mosquitos only for a brief instant. I kept moving in defense of the mosquitos. Stop for a few seconds and the face and the back of the hands would be stinging from the bites of blood thirsty mosquitos. I could hear Jackson moving about in the dark and muttering some choice Southwestern Virginia expletives. I yelled, "Hey Jackson, can't you do something about these skeeters? They're sure hell tonight. If you ask me the whole damned situation is fouled up. What'n-hell are we doing standing guard; we're Air Force men. The Twenty Seventh Infantry is here at Hickam for special duty. Why aren't they standing guard? Anyway, those Japs aren't going to fight. Kurusu is in Washington fixing everything up with Hull. The whole mess is a political scheme just to give us dogfaces¹ something to do to earn our twenty one dollars per month. Then too, the politicians have to give the civilians some reason to support the build-up of the military forces." Jackson's hand slapped the back of his neck as he replied, "I'm transferring out of this base squadron. I've got a chance

¹ G.I.

to transfer to the 19th. Troop Carrier Squadron. Jones transferred over and he likes it fine. He is flying every day and getting out of this crappy stuff that we have in the 17th."

A car interrupted our conversation as it turned onto Hangar Avenue in our direction, the headlamps lighting up the area where we were standing. "Halt!" I yelled as I raised the riot gun to a ready position. The car came to a stop about 25 yards away. "Who goes there?" The car door opened and the dome light cast enough light for me to see that it was an officer. "Captain Saunders, Officer of the Day," the reply came back. "Advance and be recognized," I commanded. The O.D. advanced to within a few feet and questioned, "Why didn't you halt me at a much farther distance than you did?" I directed the beam of my flashlight at the O.D.'s belt buckle and replied, "I didn't figure it was much use Captain, since we don't have any ammo for these guns and a fixed bayonet isn't a long range defense weapon." The Captain continued that if he had been an enemy soldier he could have killed us with a hand grenade. "However," said the O.D., "I plan to get you boys some ammunition in the near future, but right now we just don't have any in supply." I saluted the O.D. as he departed, cursed the mosquitos, the fouled up army, and the O.D., now that he was out of ear-shot. "Jackson," I said, "This damn situation better blow over fast since we don't have anything to fight with." I was only a private but I knew that a 12 gauge semi-automatic riot gun without ammunition would not win a war. I thought back over the past several months and some of the activities concerning the 27th. Infantry Division that was doing the combat training of the Air Corps boys. They were using broom sticks for rifles. Broom sticks and empty riot guns just didn't appear to be the weapons to fight a modern war. Hell, why worry? This alert was just another maneuver to keep the G.I.'s occupied.

It seemed like an eternity and that every mosquito in the Islands had sampled my blood before daylight came and with it our guard relief. I checked the

bulletin board in the barracks and noted that I was in Charge of Quarters (C.Q.) for Saturday night. C.Q. wasn't bad duty and it would be a relief from guard duty and the mosquitos. I went to my bunk on the third floor, (the top floor) undressed, removed my wrist watch noting the time. . .it was 7:05 A.M. Saturday, December 6, 1941. I then hit the sack for some much needed shut eye.

I awoke about 3:00 P.M., grabbed my shaving kit from my foot-locker and headed for the john for a shave and shower. The john was more crowded than usual and filled with an excited tone of chatter from the users. "What's all the excitement about?", I inquired. "Haven't you heard?", a G.I. returned; his voice filled with excitement. "The alert is off; man we're headed for town." I hadn't heard, but it was good news if it was true. I returned to my bunk, donned my khaki uniform and headed for the Orderly room and C.Q. duty. I reported to the C.O., Major Barnes², who confirmed that the alert was off for the time being, and that all restrictions had been lifted. (Note: General George C. Marshall had alerted the Hawaiian command on November 25th.). The C.O. gave no reason for the alert being lifted and to this day I do not know why it was. At any rate, I was so glad that things were getting back to normal that I did not want to press the issue. I asked the C.O. to sign a pass for me since it had been over two weeks that I had been to Honolulu, and I was anxious to see Mary³, a girl that I had been dating regularly for the past several months.

I was busy for the next two or three hours handing out passes and taking phone calls which were mostly inquiries as to whether the alert was lifted or "Is there a pass for me?" It was good to see the G.I.'s back in Civies again. Civies took away some of the monotony of G.I. routine as well as putting the Dog-face

² Fictitious. The C.O.'s actual name is not used here. He was later shot down in the battle of Midway. Rumor had it that his plane was rigged by his crew since he was reportedly such a S.O.B.

³ Fictitious. Although I was ~~actually~~ dating a girl at the time.

on more equal terms with the local civilians. Even the Gooks⁵ held in low esteem the unnecessary dog-face. Others viewed him as a necessary evil and some commented that all he was good for was to get drunk as hell, beat up the local citizenry; or in turn get mobbed, robbed or thrown into the brig. Or if he escaped the latter and returned to the base from leave, curse the Island while he was sobering up; or bragging about how many whorehouses he had visited until he had screwed away his months pay at three dollars a throw. Many of us sobered up while digging the weeds out of the General's lawn. This was not special duty, it was routine.

I picked up the phone and dialed Mary, made a date for 2:00 P.M. Sunday. I cradled the phone, flicked on the radio and listened to dance music from the ballroom of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. Hell, I couldn't afford the Royal Hawaiian, but my 1931 Dodge touring car was running smooth and it would get Mary and me up to the Pali.⁶ (NOTE: I didn't get to use the Dodge the next day. The Japs shot it full of holes and a large piece of shrapnel went through the windshield and cut the supporting back wooden bows, letting the top fall down onto the body. Picture enclosed). At twelve midnight I snapped off the radio; made a last minute check of the Orderly room, and climbed the stairs to my sack.

It was 8:10 A.M., Hawaiian time, 1:40 Eastern Standard time, Sunday, December 7, 1941. I awoke to the sound of what I thought was heavy artillery gunfire. It was not unusual since target sleeves were regularly towed over Hickam. However, it did seem louder, sharper and more erratic than usual. I remarked to Simmons in the adjacent bunk, "I wish this damn target practice could be held sometime instead of a Sunday morning." I flipped back the blanket, yawned, stretched and ^{waited} casually to the west windows to take a look. I could see a plane at about ^{altitude} 500 feet coming toward the barracks. Again this was not out of the ordinary and

⁵ Native Hawaiian or mixture of Japanese or Chinese.

⁶ Pali - Famous Mountain Pass on the Island of Oahu.

I still did not suspect what was happening. My interest quickened and my curiosity was aroused when I saw a large object drop from the plane. The next instant there was a terrific explosion and the Engine repair depot seemed to disintegrate. At the same time the plane pulling out of the dive was clearly marked with the insignia of The Rising Sun of Japan. So much had happened in the last few seconds I was paralyzed. This was it! All the rumors of war had suddenly materialized here on this peaceful Sabbath morning. I wheeled and yelled as loudly as I could, "The Goddam Japs are here!" Suddenly the floor was alive with activity. Simmons slid under his blanket and covered his head. I yelled, "You'd better get the hell out of there, because that is no protection. He did. I went to my locker to get my gas mask. I was so nervous that I could not work the combination to the lock. Pandemonium prevailed. Panic stricken men were going in every direction, none of them knowing where they were going, myself included. There was no leadership, so it was every man for himself. A sudden explosion drowned out the roar of the plane overhead. The plane was so low that it had dropped the bomb through the window, intentional or otherwise, it tore a huge hole in the floor and filled the barracks with flying shrapnel. Chaos reigned. Somehow I managed to get my locker open and sling my cannister gas maske across my shoulder. We had no guns, so I headed down the stairwell toward the supply room. As I reached the ground floor landing I noted that several of the dying and wounded had been dragged inside for what little protection there was. Through the window I could see that the entire hangar line was being destroyed. All the hangars except one were damaged or burning. The one intact was the one containing the gymnasium. Here I bumped into Bob Gordon, my friend and buddy of the past two years. His face no longer carried that pleasant Mississippi smile; it was drawn and haggard. Bob asked, "What are we going to do?" I remarked, trying to appear calm, "Hells fire, Bob, I don't know, I'm as confused as everyone else." We went to the john and as we were relieving ourselves Bob asked, "Are you afraid?" "Hell yes," I replied, "but I don't know of a damned thing I

can do about it." We decided to go to the supply room and get a gun and some ammunition. The supply room was locked. A group of us broke open the door. The rifles were all neatly locked in the racks. Somehow the locks were broken and I grabbed a 1903 Springfield and a Colt 45 automatic. The ammunition was stored in boxes on the shelves and we dragged several boxes to the floor. The windows of the supply room were at ground level and each bomb that hit near sent fragments of shrapnel flying into the room. So we lay on the floor while filling our bandoleers. I filled two completely and stuffed my front pockets with 45 ammo. "O.K. Bob," I said, "Let's go get some Japs." We dashed to the front yard of the barracks and that was the last I saw of Bob for several days. Note; Bob went to Radio school and became a radio operator on a B-17 Bomber. He and the crew were shot up badly over Bougainville in the Solomon Islands. Bob's leg was shot off just above the knee by a Jap 20mm. After several months in the hospital in New Zealand he returned to the mainland. He holds the Purple Heart, the Air Medal, The Distinguished Flying Cross, and was recommended for The Distinguished Service Medal. I talked with Bob after I returned to the States and he stated that my comment in the john during the Pearl Harbor attack had helped him many times when the going was rough.

The Jap planes were using the fleecy cloud banks over the eastern mountain range as cover. Formations of dive bombers would suddenly appear out of these banks headed for their targets. At a precise moment they would "peel off" into a dive and release their bombs, almost at smoke-stack height over the ships anchored in the harbor. Large columns of smoke were billowing from the burning navy vessels. After releasing their bombs the Jap planes would fly into this huge smoke column for protection from what little anti-aircraft fire there was.

I kneeled to have a more steady position as I fired at planes that were bombing and strafing. I was able to get one shot as the plane came in and one shot as it went away. I would line up my sight on the front of the plane, pull the trigger,

rapidly work the bolt and using my knee as a pivot, turn and fire again. I repeated this procedure for some time. I tried my 45 for awhile, all without results. In humiliation and disgust I shook my fist at the attacking planes. With tears streaming down my face I cursed the slant eyed bastards, using every curse word that I could muster.

Suddenly there was a lull in the attack. Someone yelled, "Assemble here." I noted that a Staff Sergeant was doing the commanding. I did not know him and I inquired as to what was going on. "We need volunteers to protect the Headquarters Building. Fall in, column of two's." It was at this moment I recognized my C.O. I shall never forget the haggard expression on his face. While commenting on the chaotic situation, I detected the strong odor of whiskey on his breath. He also explained that protection was needed at the Headquarters Building. I volunteered and fell in at the rear of the column. "Forward March," the Staff Sergeant yelled. The column had gone only a short distance when the Japs resumed the attack. One plane had singled out the platoon for his strafing run. I noted this and yelled, "Scatter men", and everyone did except the sergeant. "God dammit," he shouted, "I'm in charge of this platoon and I will give the orders". Fortunately no one was hit but it was luck and not the manner in which the sergeant was handling the platoon. I got back in formation with the thought that if we are to win this war we would have to do it in columns of two's. In peace time we even marched to the General's lawn to dig weeds in column of two's, and now in war time it looked as though we'd fight the Japs in column of two's. Somehow we made it to the Headquarters Building, even though we were under constant attack. The Japs were trying to bomb and straf the flag from the flagpole. The last time I saw it that day it was battered and torn, but still waving majestically in the breeze. The column split up at Headquarters and I ducked behind some hedge at the front corner of the building. I noticed Colonel Boyd standing at the front entrance of the building, puffing on a

cigarette that protruded from a long black cigarette holder. He appeared to be the calmest man I had seen since the attack began. A bomb exploded nearby and took off part of the corner of the building and I landed several feet away; uninjured and running like hell. Out of the corner of my eye I got my last glimpse of Colonel Boyd that day as he went under a bulldozer, head first, cigarette-holder and all. By God! It was time to go somewhere and I was moving across the quadrangle in front of the water tower. At this time a peculiar thought struck me. I wondered how long it would be before I would be able to get another three day pass. To this day I cannot explain why the thought occurred to me at this particular time.

In the openness of the quadrangle a Jap had singled me out for his strafing run. I was running at full speed and at the same time watching the plane swing into line with me from a banking turn. I knew it was hopeless and that I couldn't get out of the line of fire. I could see the smoke from the plane's machine guns as he opened fire. The turf was flying in all directions as the machine gun bullets ripped into it in front of me. I had a feeling this was it. At the last second I dived sideways; 1903 Springfield, bandoleers, forty five pistol and all. Somehow I was not hit. I believe that I was so damned scared that I outran the bullets. Once I realized that I was uninjured, I charged at full speed across the quadrangle. Realizing that I was all alone I crawled under a small shrub near the harbor shore. A Jap plane was coming in over the harbor. I snapped a shot at it with my rifle and then noticed that he was in trouble. I noted that tracers were fast coming in line with the plane. Suddenly there was an explosion and no Jap plane. Flaming fragments fell into the billowing smoke column for which the plane was headed for protection. I watched two more Jap planes being shot down by this same battery. At least there was someone that knew what he was doing, and it was an encouraging sight.

I had been under the small shrub for only a few minutes when the attack ended. I heard some voices down the shoreline and headed in that direction. Luckily it was several of the boys from my squadron. "Pop" Swain was on the ground with a wounded

thigh and uttering some very choice four letter G.I. words. "Dammit," he stated, "I went all through the first war without a scratch and here I get wounded on the very first day of this one."

The blare of a loud speaker interrupted our chatter. "Get all the women and children off the base." It continued that trucks were being sent to officers and enlisted mens quarters. I was helping search the homes for women and children when I bumped into Jackson. We shook hands and greeted each other as though it had been years since we had seen eachother instead of 16 hours ago when we were on guard duty together. We worked together searching the homes. Finding women and children under beds, some outside, and some already preparing to leave. We completed the house to house search and when it was reported that all had been removed from the Post, Jackson and I decided to return to our barracks to get a few things we thought we would need. The damage was greater than I had anticipated. The beautiful palm trees were twisted grotesquely and many had been cut down by bomb fragments. The street curbs were completely cut away to road level in most places. The barracks were battle scarred and most of the roof of the wing that I had occupied had been bombed and burned away. Upon reaching the third floor I was very much surprised to learn that there had been looting and pilfering. Several of my personal things were missing, including my new portable Zenith radio. It just did not seem possible to me that this could have occured; but facts were facts, it had.

Jac kson and I returned to the Harbor shore which had been established as somewhat of a rendezvous. It was decided that we would dig in here for the time being until better plans could be made. We selected an area just in front of one of the abandoned officers homes. Throughout the remainder of the day, frantic preparations were made to prepare for nightfall and the expect invasion. Rumors were a dime a dozen. One was the the Japs had done so much damage that they were preparing to take the island. No one knew just how, but we were told to be on the lookout for para-troops.

Double guards were to be placed at all posts. Jackson requested to serve with me. We looked over the area that we were assigned and located a manhole as a location to make our stand in event the Japs landed. Should we be alive beyond that point, we planned to retreat to the mountains to the east. We lifted the manhole cover and found that we could get in without too much difficulty. We replaced the cover, leaving just enough space along the rim to get a good grip on the cover, in case we should need to remove it in a hurry.

Throughout the early part of the night everything was deathly quiet. Not a light could be seen anywhere. Without warning, the cracking of machine gun fire roared through the stillness of the night. Then all hell broke loose. Tracer patterns from every angle filled the sky, making criss-cross patterns and at the same time seeming to cover the ground completely. The tracer streaks were so thick and so close to the earth that I feared running into them and they were all around me. I was sure the invasion had begun and took off at full speed to the manhole with Jackson in pursuit. I was running and at the same time bending as low as possible for it appeared that we were just managing to stay under the tracers from the machine gun fire. Jackson yelled, "Stop! stop, I have forgotten how to shoot this rifle." I stopped and showed him how to release the safety and work the bolt. This was not as difficult as it sounds since there was enough light from the gun fire to perform the demonstration. Once this was completed I was off again at full speed. Jackson yelled the same thing again and I repeatedly showed him how to operate the gun. This happened the third time before we reached our manhole. We did not realize it until sometime later that we were standing on two other soldiers that had beat us to the manhole. It seemed impossible since there was only room for Jackson and myself earlier when we had made the selection.

All was quiet again, just as suddenly as it had begun. I gazed into the starlit sky and wondered what lay ahead and where it would all end. . . .Monday, December 8, I lay in a fox hole and listened to a small radio that some one had placed nearby and

listened to President Roosevelt when he said these memorable words: Yesterday,
December 7, 1941 -- a date which will live in infamy.

I. W. Southern