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"THREE HOURS OF HELL"

On the morning of December 7, 1941 my wife and I were in bed in our quarters on Hickam Field. These quarters were brand new, and I believe we were the first occupants. It was a small, duplex-type, 2 bedroom apartment, all on the ground floor and located just a block or two from the Hickam Field Officers' Club. It was situated alongside and facing the harbor (water) entrance to Pearl Harbor. It was so close to the water that when the Navy carriers went in and out of the harbor, it would get dark in the house as the ships passed by in front! The Pan American Airways clipper ships also landed and took off in this same part of the harbor, in front of our house. It was an idyllic setting, and a beautiful assignment for two young newlyweds (we were married in November, 1939). We had been assigned to Hawaii, and arrived there in March, 1941.

As we had partied at the "O Club" the night before, and had gotten to bed rather late, we were sleeping in. At approximately 5 minutes to 8, local time, we were both awakened by a loud explosion. I got out of bed immediately, went to the front window and looked out toward the main part of the harbor (not directly in view). Nothing appeared to be amiss, except for a large cloud of black smoke roiling toward the sky. I went to the door and looked out. There was still no clue as to what was going on other than the sound of a good many aircraft in the air. This in itself was not at all unusual. The Navy aircraft carriers frequently came into the harbor on Sunday mornings, but before entering, they would launch their aircraft at sea. The aircraft would then fly in to land at Ford Island.

My first thought at this point was that the Navy was conducting some sort of maneuver or exercise in a most realistic manner, or that perhaps one of the aircraft had crashed in landing. My second thought was that something was wrong, but I couldn't quite pinpoint what it was. My wife and I got dressed and went out into the yard. By now, the sound of aircraft was prevalent (although not directly overhead). There were also sounds of machine gun fire, and an occasional "whump" and splash of smoke at altitude from anti-aircraft fire. Soon, there were other "whumps" from exploding bombs and torpedoes in the area of Ford Island, and the main part of Pearl Harbor. Perhaps 5 or 10 minutes had elapsed from the time we had rolled out of bed. About this time, a Jap torpedo bomber roaring away from the main part of the harbor went skimming overhead at tree-top level. I will never forget the sight of the big, red, "meatball" on the side of that plane. Now, we knew what was going on, and we were immediately cast into a state of shock. How could it happen here?!

The first thing I needed to do was get my wife to a place of "relative" safety, and then get myself to my duty post. The place of safety was my neighbors' house; it was a little farther away from the harbor, and was a 2-story building. Women and children were told to stay out of sight in the utility room and, if possible, under something.

At this time, my duty assignment was Operations Officer of the special tow target and drone flight attached to the 19th Transp. Sq. Therefore, my duty post was at the flight line at Hickam Field. We operated out of one of the big, western-most hangars along the E-W runway and parking ramp. The aircraft assigned to this flight were totally non-combat equipped. Two twin-engine bombers, a B-18 and a B-12 were equipped for towing targets for coastal anti-aircraft units to practice their marksmanship on, at low and medium altitudes. There were about a dozen converted drone BT-13's (biplanes), equipped with radio controls and tri-cycle landing gear. In addition, there were 3 or 4 "mother-ship" BT-13's with the command radio control equipment and standard landing gear. Absolutely none of these aircraft could or would amount to a "damn" in any immediate or future defense effort, and therefore might just as well have been blown up in the initial attack by the Japs. However, I still felt a strong obligation to get to the flight line and see what could be done to save anything.

The flight line and our hangar was just about straight south of my quarters, and about $1\frac{1}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles distant. I could walk, take my car, or go by bicycle (which I frequently did anyway). I elected to take the bike. It would give me speed, more flexibility, and present less of a target for some strafing Zero.

The time now, I estimate, was about 8:30 as I pedaled breathlessly and with dry throat toward the flight line. I can't remember many details of this and several more bike trips to and from the flight line, except that a strong, hot wind was blowing from the south. The air was punctuated now by the sound of aircraft engines, bombs and machine guns (all, or nearly all, Japanese). Smoke was rising in a lot of places along the flight line, and behind me at Pearl Harbor.

After what seemed like an eternity, I arrived at the flight line. Our hangar had taken several hits, and an LB-30 (converted Liberator) parked just outside was burning amidships. About 100 feet away, our B-18 and B-10 were parked --- still unscathed. The hangar doors were shut (and most likely jammed), so that it would be impossible to get the drones out, had there been any need to. (I can no longer remember where the C-47's of the 19th T.C. Sq. were parked. They may have been out at other bases, except for one or two in the hangar). There were no other personnel in sight except for one enlisted man. I asked him to unchock the B-18. After starting the engines, I taxied it to a remote part of the field along one of the runways, where it might stand a chance of survival. I then ran back to the ramp area and tried to start up the B-10. I could only get one engine to fire off, but it was enough to get some rolling speed forward. By judicious use of that one engine and the brakes, I coaxed it out to one of the dispersal stands.

Again, I ran back to the hangar area. The LB-30 was already too far gone to do anything about, and there was considerable danger from exploding gas tanks at any time. About this time, my thoughts returned to the question of my wife's safety. I decided to return to the quarters area and check on that. I hadn't proceeded more than 100 yards from the hangar area before I glanced toward the east, and there coming out of the rays of the morning sun was a dozen or more Jap bombers. They were driving down the length of the parking ramp and hangar line at 6 to 8 thousand feet, dropping their lethal "eggs" with easy precision and no interference from below or above. I was glad I had gotten our 2 birds out of that area a few minutes before. I kept on pedaling, albeit with more haste. It was easier going back with the wind behind me.

Back at the quarters, there were no really new developments. The women and children were all safe, although a little hysteria among the kids was evident. There had been no direct attacks noted on quarters or personnel in the open. Of course, the electricity and water pressure was now at zero and all the telephones were dead.

Not knowing what better to do, I decided I should go back to the flight line again. What my objective would be once I got there was really not clear at this time. When I did arrive at the hangar, I decided to go inside and see if perhaps there might be someone (maybe wounded) in the hangar. There was no one in the offices, and there seemed to be no one in the main hangar. I shouted, trying to get a response. I got none. I opened the door to the machine shop, and it was a shambles. Evidently, it had taken a direct hit. The first thing I saw was a body lying on the floor near the door. Whoever it was had been decapitated; there was no head on the body. (To this day, I do not know who the unlucky man was). I choked back a wave of nausea, and shouted on the chance there might be others who had perhaps been more fortunate. My shouts brought no response. Again, I decided to make tracks out of there and back to the quarters area. I reasoned that during the attack, the hangars and flight line would be prime targets and would probably be hit again and again. It would be a very bad place to be when the bombs came raining down. For once in my life, I was right. Not only that, but the good Lord above must have had a lot to do with my timing. Three times that morning I made the hectic round trip, from quarters to flight line and back. As far as I know, the nearest I came to being a casualty was when (on the last trip) a jagged shell fragment about 6" long and 1" wide clattered to the pavement several yards in front of my bike. I stopped to pick it up, but immediately dropped it. It was still quite hot from the explosion that had sent it in my direction. If it had struck me on the head ... well, I wouldn't be writing these memoirs. Somehow, I had timed these trips so that each time the flight line was "plastered", I was back in the quarters area checking on the well-being of the better half.

On the last trip, which must have been around 11 o'clock, I can recall seeing the sticks of bombs dropping away from the bombers over the flight line, and arcing gracefully and swiftly down to their targets below.

Back in the quarters area the action was beginning to heat up a little. Women and kids were OK, and there still had been no attacks on the quarters. However, Naval activity in the harbor out front was beginning to pick up. Several destroyers and light cruisers that had been able to get personnel on board and get underway were exiting the harbor at flank speed, with their sirens blowing. One such cruiser took a near miss off its port bow directly in front of my quarters. I can still see the water spout that went up. Anti-aircraft guns were firing as they went by.

Some of the battle wagons, mortally wounded but still upright and able to get away from their berths along Ford Island, steamed slowly out toward the shallow mud flats in the outer harbor. They would be allowed to settle there in the mud to keep them from turning turtle.

The rest of the events of this day were not so clearly etched in my mind. In the first 3 hours of that attack, I had turned into an emotional, mental and physical wreck. My eyes burned from the smoke, dust, wind and heat which seemed to be everywhere. My heart pounded, and my legs ached from pushing that bike back and forth. My throat was parched, and my mouth was without saliva.

One of the strangest aspects of those hectic 3 hours is that except for the women and kids in the immediate area of our quarters, I have almost no recollection of the names or faces of any other people. Those I must have seen or come in contact with on my trips to and fro on the bike have been completely forgotten. I believe it must have been the effects of the shock. I was like a zombie acting on impulse, but not really knowing what I was doing or seeing. I don't think I have fully recovered yet from that shock, and may never during this lifetime! It was like a very bad dream.

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