

## Chapter 9

### **WORLD WAR II**

You are well aware that the United States entered the Second World War with the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. However, you are probably not aware of the long-term effects of that attack on the Islands. The first factor is that the attack was not as much of a surprise as we have been led to believe. The military was well aware of the fact that Hawai`i was a prime target of the Japanese as they expanded their empire in the Pacific. There was a high degree of military preparedness in general in the Islands that included close surveillance of any AJAs whose loyalty could be considered suspect.

One of the new technologies being developed as the U.S. moved ever closer to war was radar. Both permanent and mobile radar stations had been set up in Hawai`i in anticipation of an air attack. However, the technology was not perfected and was considered somewhat unreliable by some in the military. At seven a.m. on that Sunday morning two privates manning one of the mobile stations picked up a large concentration of aircraft. Neither man had previously seen this large a number of planes. The planes were incoming approximately 140 miles northwest of the Islands. When the planes reached 120 miles out, they called in a warning. The switchboard operator had difficulty locating an officer to respond to the privates. When an officer was eventually located, he stated that either the planes were on maneuvers from Hickam Air Base on O`ahu or they were a large flight of inbound B-52s from the mainland. The later supposition is hard to take seriously as the planes were approaching from the West.

The Japanese could not have picked a more opportune time to attack. After a long Saturday night of partying in Honolulu many of the troops would not have been at their sharpest on an early Sunday morning. The Japanese planes reached their primary target of Pearl Harbor at five minutes till eight. Secondary targets at Hickam Field and the Army post, Schofield Barracks, also quickly came under attack. The warnings of the radar operators and the four a.m. sighting of a periscope by a mine sweeper off Pearl Harbor had both been ignored and the U.S. forces were caught by surprise. The results of the attack are well documented: 3,435 U.S. casualties, eight battleships and ten other large ships severely damaged, and 188 planes destroyed. The Japanese lost 29 planes and five midget subs that had been trying to blockade the entrance of the harbor to prevent the

U.S. ships from escaping. It was an extreme bit of luck that all of the U.S. aircraft carriers were at sea at the time of the attack. These same carriers later were able to win a major naval battle when the Japanese navy was dealt a blow from which they never recovered off Midway Island at the far western end of the Hawaiian Archipelago.

The immediate effect of the attack on Pearl was rapid preparations for a land invasion by the Japanese. Many thought that the air attack was a precursor for a land assault on the islands within a few days. General Short ordered Governor Poindexter to declare martial law. The Governor called the president who had appointed him, FDR, to get his advice. Roosevelt agreed that he should comply with the order. He further stated that martial law would be short lived if there were no invasion. This turned out to be extremely inaccurate as martial law remained in effect for the duration of the war, long after there was any real threat to Hawai`i. Poindexter was replaced by a military governor and the civilian government was stripped of all power. The military wielded enormous power during this period. They censored the press, froze wages and set the hours of work, controlled rents, regulated restaurants and bars, declared curfews and blackouts, and replaced the local courts with military tribunals with no writ of habeas corpus. These acts were blatant violations of the rights of Hawaiian citizens, but to criticize these measures was considered unpatriotic. The powerful sugar planters wasted no time in inviting high ranking military officers to their social events. In a short period of time the Big Five insured that they would be serving as advisors to the military which reinforces their influence over the islands.

One of the first problems facing the military government was what to do about the 160,000 individuals of Japanese ancestry living in Hawai`i. This was a much more complex issue than measures that were taken to deal with AJA's on the West coast of the United States. In the first place there was no facility that could possibly be used to inter even one-third of these people in the islands. With the setback that the navy suffered at Pearl Harbor, neither the ships nor time required to move large numbers of these Americans of Japanese ancestry to the mainland could be spared. Furthermore, many AJA's provided labor that was highly skilled and considered essential to the economic wellbeing of the Islands.

Most of these AJA's were patriotic Americans. The only group of Japanese in Hawai`i with mixed patriotism were the first generation of Japanese who migrated to Hawai`i, referred to as issei. A small group of the older issei men had sympathy with Japan though they would never admit it publicly. The second

generation called nisei were very patriotic Americans, often refusing to even speak Japanese with their parents. They would not wear Japanese clothing and asked their mothers to burn their kimonos. They also asked their parents to remove Japanese shrines from their gardens and homes. In denying their heritage they searched for a niche in this new society. These young nisei went down to the recruiting office to sign up in large numbers shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Not only would the recruiters not accept their applications, but the nisei currently enrolled in ROTC programs were dismissed from these positions as well. Japanese Americans who were already members of the National Guard could not legally be dismissed, however the military wanted them off the Islands as soon as possible as they did not want them to be present if there were a Japanese invasion. These individuals were whipped out to Wisconsin and reorganized as the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry.

In January of 1943 the nisei were finally allowed to enlist. A new battalion, the 442<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, was created. These young men knew that they would only be allowed to fight in the European theater. The turn out was tremendous. Four thousand volunteered during the first week and 9,000 had enrolled within a month. Three thousand of these applicants were selected for membership in the 442<sup>nd</sup>. The 100<sup>th</sup>, like the 442<sup>nd</sup>, was destined to fight only against the Germans and Italians. They were finally given a combat assignment in 1943 and were sent to join the North African campaign just as the tide was turning against the famous German General Rommel. They played a major role in the invasion of Italy which shortly followed. They were involved in heavy fighting to capture Rome after German troops were sent to reinforce the rapidly failing Italian army. At this juncture they were joined by the 442<sup>nd</sup>. The two units fought against very heavy odds in the Northern Italian campaign where the Germans had determined to draw the line. They suffered casualty rates that were three times higher than the army average. The soldiers fought valiantly and ended up the two most decorated units in the history of the U.S. Army. They returned to Hawai'i as heroes and became some of the key players in a political revolution that has influenced the government of Hawai'i to the present day.