

# With Bombs Bursting in Air...

By Barbara Del Piano

*Editor's Note: Each month during the year 2000, writer Barbara Del Piano will highlight a decade of the Club's history. In this installment, she writes about the period 1941-1950.*

"This is the real McCoy! Stay indoors! Take cover! The Japanese are attacking Pearl Harbor!" It was the voice of Outrigger member Webley Edwards, over radio station KGMB, that informed most Hawaii residents of the outbreak of World War II.

Throughout the morning of December 7, 1941, the message was repeated over and over in stunning monotony as islanders sat glued to their radios in disbelief. The booming sounds that had reverberated across much of the island during the early hours were not from anti-aircraft practice, as most people had assumed. It was indeed the "real McCoy!"

A peaceful Sunday morning was instantly transformed into a scene of deadly chaos and confusion as stray Japanese bombs dropped into residential neighborhoods and U.S. anti-aircraft shells fell back onto the city setting stores and homes on fire. Explosions were reported throughout the city, from School Street to the Governor's mansion at Washington Place. There were multiple hits in the McCully area, and even a bursting shell at the corner of Kalakaua and Lewers.

Residents of Tantalus, Alewa, Aiea, and Pacific Heights, as well as the many other areas that overlooked Pearl Harbor, gaped in horrified astonishment as Japanese dive bombers and torpedo planes dropped their deadly loads while battleships sank, gas tanks exploded, and planes came crashing down, sending huge clouds of black smoke into the air that obscured much of the carnage below.

Sirens wailed as police cars and fire trucks raced around the city in response to frantic calls of fires caused by errant bombs and bursting shells, killing and injuring innocent bystanders. A total of 60 civilians would lose their lives that day.

All civilian cars were ordered off the streets so people walked or ran to their neighborhood store to stock up on food supplies. Latecomers found nothing but empty shelves.

Amazingly, not everyone was immediately aware of what was happening, including a few early birds at the Outrigger. Bill Capp, returning from a fruitless but dangerous attempt to volunteer at the airport, stopped by the Outrigger to find Duke Kahanamoku peacefully eating breakfast, and Club Manager Henry DeGorog nonchalantly preparing for the usual activities of a typical sunny Sunday at the Club.

Returning home, Capp found his Waikiki apartment filled with neighbors, one of them unconscious on the floor and coffee dripping from the ceiling. Apparently, when a shell burst nearby, the dumbfounded woman tossed her cup into the air, shouting "Oh my God!", then promptly fainted.

By 11:30 a.m., martial law had been declared. All saloons were ordered closed, a curfew was imposed, and a total blackout went into effect. Because of the fear of an

imminent land invasion, volunteers were recruited and eventually they would number more than 20,000 men. Civil defense workers, ROTC units, and the Territorial Guard were called into defensive action.

A Woman's Army Volunteer Group, consisting of over 400 women, provided badly needed support services. The beaches and coastline were fortified with rolls of barbed wire stretched on wooden scaffolds and guarded by military personnel. Machine gun emplacements were erected all along the shoreline, with several at Waikiki Beach.

Since the draft had been in effect for some time, many young Hawaii men were already in the service. Waldo Bowman was in the Army, living on base at Hickam Field. In his Outrigger oral history, Bowman recalls how he and his wife discussed plans to go surfing at Makapuu later that morning when a series of horrendous explosions shook their home.

Waldo's reaction was "That Navy is dredging out at Pearl Harbor and wouldn't you know they'd wait until Sunday morning to do their blasting". The words were barely out of his mouth when the roar of a plane skimming over the roof drew him hurriedly to the window. "I look up and it keels over and I see the red "meatball" under the wing." That was the end of Bowman's quiet Sunday morning.

Many young men had joined the Navy, like Outrigger members Bob and Johnny Dolan, and their brother Phil. Although they were on active duty, Bob and Phil reported to desk jobs in the Alexander Young Hotel in downtown Honolulu while Johnny was sent to Hilo. Now, suddenly, all military units were mobilized for war!

Food, gasoline, and even liquor shortages caused these now-precious items to be rationed. Gas masks were issued and everyone was required to carry one at all times. (Toddlers were issued ones with bunny ears.) Schools, public and private, were taken over in whole or in part by various branches of the military. Some, such as Iolani, with its all-male student body, closed down indefinitely. All normal activities were suspended and Hawaii residents hunkered down for the duration.

Life at the Outrigger changed as dramatically as it did everywhere else. Many members were drafted or enlisted and were sent off to fight the war. Others, including many of the Waikiki Beachboys, who were also Outrigger members, took defense jobs which required long hours of overtime with little time left for leisure activities.

Some had jobs that were declared essential to the war effort and remained "frozen" to their positions. Dozens of younger members were "evacuated" to the mainland to live with friends and relatives.

War or no war, life did go on at the Outrigger, although there were fewer members to be seen on the premises and most activities, both social and athletic, were drastically curtailed. Volleyball supplanted surfing as the major form of recreation until boards and canoes were allowed back into the water.

Always noted for its civic involvement, the Club took on a new commitment to do its part in the war effort. The Outrigger opened its doors to members of the armed forces and provided a home away from home for

hundreds of homesick young men from all branches of the military, putting the Club's facilities at their disposal throughout the week. (The weekends were reserved for members).

Under the sponsorship of the USO, dances were held each Wednesday from one to three in the afternoon and sandwiches and refreshments were served with the cooperation of the Red Cross. The Club provided surf boards and canoes for those who wished to engage in ocean sports and a ping pong table was installed upstairs as an additional form of recreation.

With so many members away for the duration, new faces replaced the old and the newcomers were welcomed with patriotic fervor. In appreciation, the Club received letters of commendation from Admirals Chester Nimitz and William "Bull" Halsey, General Robert C. Richardson, and other commanding generals.

The dues for Club members who were serving as enlisted men were reduced to \$1 a month and a new category of Service Membership was added. Commissioned officers were allowed to join the Club for an initiation fee of \$18 and dues of \$3.33 per month.

Former Club President, Ernest H. "Tommy" Thomas was a young Army Lieutenant from Missouri stationed at Fort Shafter when he was first introduced to the Outrigger Canoe Club and it soon became his home away from home. Another service member was Major General Clarence L. Tinker who was shot down while leading a flight of LB-30 "Liberators" on a long-range strike against Japanese forces on Wake Island. Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma, his native state, was named in his honor.

In all, 21 Outrigger members lost their lives in World War II.

Several months after the war started, the Club's regal neighbor, the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, was taken over by the Navy for use as a "rest and rehabilitation" center for war-weary submarine crews, relieving the Club of some of its hospitality duties.

Throughout the war, more than 200,000 men were able to spend a ten day leave in the once palatial surroundings, although alterations were made to make the premises more suitable to the new clientele. The cocktail bar was turned into a soda fountain and cots were crowded into the elegant suites. Enlisted men paid nothing for the accommodations, while officers were charged \$1 per night.

Like every other club and restaurant, the Outrigger was affected by the food and liquor shortages, but fortunately, Manager DeGorog had excellent connections, and the Club managed to remain reasonably well stocked with these hard-to-get items. According to Bill Barnhart, Club member Bill Hollinger, who worked for Hawaii Brewing Co., made sure there was always plenty of Primo beer on hand.

Gradually, regular activities at the Club resumed, although under rigid conditions. The military installed gates in the barbed wire and canoes and surf boards were permitted back in the water, but everyone had to be back on shore by sundown.

Bill Barnhart describes one occasion, when just as the sun was setting, a few "die-hards" decided to wait for

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just one more wave. As the sun sank below the horizon, the machine guns along the coast began shooting over the heads of the surfers. Needless to say, they paddled in as fast as they could, with their heads as close to their boards as possible.

Social activities started up again on a limited scale with the Club even celebrating the first anniversary of its new building with a Valentine's Day party in February of 1942 that included dancing, music and entertainment. The party took place from 1 to 4 p.m. In May, a party celebrating Decoration Day was held from 4 to 7 p.m.

Of course, precautions were taken in case of an emergency, such as an air raid alarm, when everyone on the premises would be instructed to leave the dining room and seek shelter in the main building.

The Canoe Flag on the beach building would be lowered to notify members in the water to come ashore. Hours in the dining room were of course subject to change with blackout regulations, but for the most part, dinner was served from 5 to 6:30 p.m.

The battle of Midway, the turning point for the war in the Pacific, was already raging although the public had not been informed. On June 4, 1943, the Navy broke its silence with an announcement that Midway was under attack. That same day, the Club's flag flew at half mast.

A bystander might well have assumed that it was a tribute to a Club member killed in battle. Instead, it announced the untimely passing of the Club's much loved President, Walter J. "Walter Mac" Macfarlane, who died of typhoid fever in Oakland, California, at the age of 36.

Plans were underway for an Independence Day Regatta in front of the Club, the first competitive canoe event since the outbreak of the war.

At the suggestion of Manager DeGorog, it was decided to name the races in honor of "Walter Mac", a fitting tribute to one who had so masterfully steered the Club through perilous times and whose lifelong devotion to Hawaiian water sports provided a compelling incentive to ensure the Outrigger's survival.

The first Macfarlane Regatta took place as scheduled on July fourth and Matson Navigation donated a magnificent silver bowl to be known as the Walter James Macfarlane Perpetual Trophy to be awarded to the winner of the "senior six" crew. Canada Dry and American Factors also donated trophies and financial support because of their high regard for "Walter Mac".

A full page advertisement in the Honolulu Advertiser announced the regatta and invited the public to attend. A variety of events were slated, including sailing boat racing, surfing contests, both single and tandem, and even a tug-of-war between the two top contestants, Outrigger and Hui Nalu. In all, six clubs participated, and the day was considered an outstanding success.

A special event of the regatta was an "enlisted men's six" canoe race. The Outrigger team, coached and steered by Duke Kahanamoku, consisted of Tommy O'Brien, Mickey Beggs, Jim Fernie, Gil Carr, and Bob Bush. The Dolan brothers, John and Bob, coached a team of Navy men from the Royal. They came in a close second to the Outrigger. The race was on the regatta agenda for three years, and the Outrigger team won the

race all three years. In 1943 the winning crew was honored when Admiral "Bull" Halsey presented the trophy.

After victory in the Battle of Midway, which pre-figured the end of the war, more and more restrictions were lifted from the civilian population, and in October of 1944, Martial Law was finally revoked. The atomic bombs dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August of 1945 brought the enemy to its knees and the war was finally over.

V-J Day, September 1, 1945, was a day of great celebration throughout the United States and much of the world. At the Outrigger, spontaneous revelry erupted when the long awaited word was received. Cheers and toasts reverberated throughout the Club as members and their guests seized the moment to fete the historical event, albeit in a somewhat boisterous fashion. Behind the bar, Anzai had a hard time keeping the orders filled.

The many changes evoked by the War and its aftermath, brought about changes at the Outrigger. In September of 1941, the initiation fee for regular members was \$10 and dues were \$5 per month. With a membership that had grown to over 800, in June of 1946, the Board of Directors upped the initiation fee to the astronomical sum of \$300. One consolation was a hearty business man's lunch, still available for \$1.

While people spoke of the return to "normalcy", the changes that had occurred in Waikiki were irrevocable. There was no going back to those tranquil, lazy, laid back pre-war days. A new impetus spurred the dormant visitor industry into action and visionaries, like Henry J. Kaiser and Club member Roy C. Kelley, began to change the face of Waikiki for all time. Caught in the very epicenter of a new and frenzied building spree, the Outrigger could only take a passive role and wait to see the outcome.

On February 1, 1946, the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, restored, remodeled, and refurbished at a cost of over one million dollars, opened its doors to the public for the first time since the Navy take-over. At a gala reception that rivaled the one for the grand opening exactly 20 years ago to the day, prominent people from both the Islands and

the mainland flocked to the magnificent "pink palace", and an enormous birthday cake was served to mark the anniversary of the hotel and its return to prewar glory.

The Matson ships, along with their hotels, had done their part in the war effort, and the flag ship *Lurline* had served honorably as a troop transport. An enormous multi-million dollar reconditioning and refurbishing job was undertaken after the war but it was not until April 21, 1948, that the majestic steamer made its way back into Honolulu Harbor to resume its reincarnation as a luxury liner plying the blue Pacific between Hawaii and the west coast.

Mayor John H. Wilson declared April 21 as "Lurline Day", predicting that the ship's arrival would "mark an important period in the maritime history of this city". The mayor called upon "all our people to observe this day by the display of flags, the wearing of island flowers and in other such manner as may be appropriate".

A flotilla of dozens of water craft of all kinds including a Club canoe manned by Outrigger paddlers, went out to "steamer lane" to welcome the grand dame home. A gigantic lei, purported to be the largest ever made, was dropped over her bow by helicopter. And of course, the Royal Hawaiian Band, with singer Miriam Leilani, was on the pier to provide a grand musical aloha.

The Outrigger Canoe Club involved itself in the many activities, that by virtue of its location, took place around it. It was swept along with the tides of change over which it had no control, but for the most part enjoyed the prosperity that accompanied them.

Annual fiscal reports showed increased revenues, and membership swelled. At long last, money was available to start a building fund, something never before possible. The Club was more popular than ever, with its broad appeal to all ages and segments of the community, proving beyond a doubt, that despite a World War, its mission was still valid and its goals clearly defined.

Next month: 1951-1960

