

Pearl Harbor

December 7, 1941, is a date few will ever forget, for on that day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, the Philippines, Malaya, Singapore and Hong Kong. The United States was at war.

Following news of the attacks, Long Beach along with the rest of the world was stunned. Hundreds of churchgoers leaving their places of worship at noon gathered before the windows of the *Long Beach Independent* to read late news bulletins. Many Navy wives residing in Long Beach were visibly shaken, for practically every one of them had a husband serving in the Pacific. The Army asked the city to loan them a sound truck so they could cruise the streets and broadcast orders for enlisted personnel to report to their stations, but no truck was available. It turned out OK, the truck was not needed---most servicemen, on hearing news of the attacks had already reported back to base to find out what to do next. At the Long Beach police station all was routine, yet tenseness could be detected as department heads kept near phones to find out more about the tragedy and a possible invasion of the west coast.

Federal agents and Army troops rushed to establish a blockade around Terminal Island where several thousand Japanese, chiefly engaged in the fishing industry, made their homes. Their fishing boats were turned back into the harbor and not allowed to proceed to the off-shore fishing grounds. Frank Ishii, president of the Long Beach chapter of the Japanese-American Citizens League pledged support of the United States in its war with Japan. He mentioned that thirty local Japanese youths were serving in the U.S. armed forces and that the entire community would give their support to the United States. Despite Ishii's assurances everyone viewed any Oriental as a possible spy or saboteur. Five hundred alien Japanese throughout Southern California were taken into custody on December 8th by the FBI, booked, fingerprinted and photographed before being transported to the Terminal Island Federal Immigration Station. Hashimoto Co.'s hardware and boat supply store on Terminal Island was seized by the military, looking for any supplies that could be used in sabotage efforts against the U.S.

The concern over sabotage was a real one. During World War I, shortly after America entered the war with Germany, a fire broke out at the National Kelp Potash plant in the Long Beach harbor. The factory, which used potash to make explosives, was completely destroyed. At first it was felt the fire had been caused by a gas explosion resulting from the installation of a new gas system at the facility, but later it was determined to be a bomb. Government investigators concluded German saboteurs were at work in the Long Beach harbor district seeking to cripple Uncle Sam by destroying plants where gun powder ingredients were manufactured. The secret service said they did not feel the fire had been set by paid or official agents of Germany, but by fanatical hotheads who thought they were helping the Fatherland. Others felt differently---they were sure it was the result of German secret agents. It appeared the bomb had been placed in the furnace room of the kelp-potash plant while men were installing a new gas main. When they left to get additional equipment the building was left unattended---the perfect time for saboteurs to sneak in and plant the incendiary device. Investigators found the remains of the bomb matched those which had been used in the east by secret agents of the German government in attempts to blow up U.S. ammunition plants. Detectives said they had information other kelp plants as well as shipyards in the harbor were targets. They felt this was merely the beginning of sabotage activities and that Long Beach must launch a home guard campaign to protect its industries from German attack.

There hadn't been a municipal airport to protect during World War I, but following the December 7th attacks the airport, which was next to the Douglas Aircraft plant and the U.S. Army and Navy air bases, took immediate action. Because of its vital military importance, civilian aircraft were notified that they would not be allowed to fly over or near the air field.

On December 8th the Long Beach City Council was asked by the Navy to issue an ordinance requesting a complete, all night blackout. Described as a "precautionary measure" by the Navy, it was the first official blackout ordered in the United States. There was no official announcement of the reason for the "precaution." This meant all illumination which could be visible from the air or street be banned---blinds drawn and any outside lights turned off. Many, including all city agencies, complied by painting their windows black. Merchants announced stores would close at 4:30 p.m. daily and open at 8 or 8:30 a.m. to take advantage of daylight hours. All outdoor advertising, street lights, traffic lights and auto headlights were banned from dusk until dawn.

December 9, 1941, the evening of the first blackout, was tragically memorable---one person was killed and six injured in auto accidents on darkened Long Beach streets. Harry Riggs, a tourist from Walla Walla, Washington, died when he was hit by a car while he was crossing Ocean Boulevard near Chestnut. Because of the darkness, witnesses were unable to determine if the pedestrian was in the cross walk or outside of it. Blue lights were the only acceptable lights for cars at night. Any cars running with any other colored lights were illegal and their drivers subject to arrest.

Southland aircraft plants undertook the huge task of covering thousands of factory windows with black paint for night work. It was estimated it would take a week to cover the windows at the Santa Monica Douglas plant; the Long Beach factory however, designed for possible blackouts, was the only Southern California airplane operation that remained on a normal schedule.

By December 13th families began to receive word of casualties at Pearl Harbor. Josephine Smith, of 234 Prospect, was the first wife to receive word of her husband's death. Albert J. Smith had recently been promoted from warrant officer to lieutenant in the Navy; he had been killed in the early attacks on the Hawaiian Islands by the Japanese.

Mrs. Fae Crawford of 3216 Vista Street was especially worried because both her husband and son were on duty on the same ship "somewhere in the Pacific." On December 18th she learned her son, Richard, had been killed in the attack on Pearl Harbor, but her husband, James, had escaped unharmed.

Rear Admiral Isaac C. Kidd experienced his own loss. His son Isaac Jr. a midshipman, whose home port was Long Beach, was also killed at Pearl Harbor. Isaac Jr. had just graduated from Annapolis.

Word followed about the deaths of John Connolly and Wilbert F. Yost, but many more men were missing. Anxious family members didn't learn until late January 1942 that Carl R. Brier, Robert R. Clayton, Clyde Brown and Frank Head had been killed in action. Further anxious moments awaited four other Long Beach families who didn't learn until the end of February that Ludwig F. Weller, Ralph A. Derrington, Allen R. Teer and Robert L. Kelly had been casualties in the bombing attack at Pearl Harbor.

Vera Jackson and her three daughters, who had left Long Beach a few months earlier for a safer environment in Pleasanton, Kansas, nervously awaited word about Jack Jackson. They knew that he was in Pearl Harbor aboard the repair ship *Medusa* and that repair ships were a target of the Japanese. Fortunately, Jack and the *Medusa* escaped the bombing, but not the carnage.

The 160 widows of Navy men killed at Pearl Harbor were now without their husband's financial support. There was no plan in place at the time for government aid to the widows. The only source of assistance was the Navy Relief Society which was supported solely by contributions. The organization realized the widows would need more help than their agency could provide. It was a chaplain from the Navy Relief Society who approached the Lockheed Company with the idea to offer jobs to the women. All the widows who resided in the Los Angeles-Long Beach area were offered employment at the Lockheed owned Vega Aircraft Company in Burbank. Nearly all the women took the basic tests for Lockheed---for now, with their husbands dead, they needed to support their families themselves. Help for those with young children came from various civic groups throughout Southern California who contributed what they could to build a nursery to care for children whose fathers were killed in the attack on Pearl Harbor. The subsidized nursery was built at the Savannah naval housing project so Navy widows could go to work. Eventually help would come from the federal government.

On December 14, 1944, the Veterans Administration extended pension privileges to widows and children of all veterans who served 90 days or longer and did not receive dishonorable discharges. A widow alone was given \$60 a month. With one child she received an extra \$18 and another \$15.60 for each additional child. Nine-tenths of husbands killed in the war carried GI insurance worth another \$55 a month for 20 years. Thus a widow with two children had a total monthly income of \$148.60. Many felt there was something terribly wrong when an able-bodied veteran, married or single, who may never have seen service outside the States, was entitled to more help than the wife and children of a man who was killed. Things changed in July 1948 when President Truman signed legislation increasing the amount paid to \$75 a month for widows; \$25 for one child, and \$15 each for all additional children.

On February 22, 1942, which marked the 210th birthday of George Washington, nearly 6000 people packed the Long Beach Municipal Auditorium to attend memorial rites for the Pearl Harbor victims and those killed since in the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies. One thousand of those attending had lost loved ones to the war. The stage, draped with a blue backdrop, was centered by a huge white cross with masses of American flags at the sides. On the stage sat men in Army and Navy uniforms.

As the Long Beach Municipal Band began to play religious melodies, the sound of sobbing could be heard throughout the auditorium. Rear Admiral Ralston S. Holmes, visibly shaken, then spoke a simple but poignant few words: "I can promise that the Navy will not forget Pearl Harbor." Unannounced, actress/singer Jeanette MacDonald appeared from the wings, moved across the stage singing "Ave Maria." California governor Culbert Olson followed her moving rendition and talked about the historic tragedy, declaring:

The tragedy of Pearl Harbor, from the shock of which we have not yet recovered, will go down in history and be remembered as America's first great sacrifice in this World War. As we meet to pay tribute to the victims of the Pearl Harbor disaster and to those who made the supreme sacrifice in defense of the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies, we can truthfully say that they did not die in vain.

U.S. Navy chaplain John Johnson read a brief burial service, after which four men representing all branches of the armed forces, brought out floral wreaths. These were hung on a background of a white cross with a large "V" at the base. Sobs echoed throughout the auditorium when a

retired Navy bugler played “Taps” and Jeanette MacDonald sang an old-time hymn, “Face to Face” and later, the “Star Spangled Banner.” Everyone in attendance had a lump in their throat and pledged that America must go on.