

Pearl Harbor remembered 44 years later

By V.L. TOWNLEY

My section rated liberty today, Sunday, December 7, 1941. A day of freedom from military duties which had become a part of life.

The options open to off-duty sailors were wonderful to contemplate.

I thought of my first set of tailor-made "whites" which had been purchased at Spud's Naval Tailors in Honolulu. I could struggle into that skin-tight uniform for a day in Waikiki, or spend a leisurely day swimming in the surf off the beach of Kailua. As I considered these pleasant alternatives, I made my way to the shower room of Barracks No. 5, Naval Air Station, Kaneohe Bay, Territory of Hawaii.

The staccato sound of machine gun fire came through the windows, opened to the warm tropical breeze. I began to shave, trying to ignore what I assumed to be the poor judgment of the Army Air Corps in holding practice runs at this early hour on Sunday morning.

A hum of conversation came from several other sailors going about the morning routine of showering and shaving, with the usual comments about the events of the night before. Each man had his own version of what he had accomplished, or more likely, failed to accomplish. One old salt, Lou Luzader, always amazed the younger men with the exotic details



V.L. Townley

of his prowess with the island ladies.

Lou, a veteran of many years of Navy duty on the China Station, appeared to be more concerned this day with the continuing gunfire. He walked to the window and said to no one in particular, "Those dog-face pilots are sure getting close."

V.L. Townley returns 'home'

V.L. Townley, a young Navy enlisted man in Hawaii that Dec. 7 morning 44 years ago today, is back where he began before World War II.

Raised at Hamlin and married to Bernice Beard who lived on a ranch between Hamlin and Rotan, Townley survived Pearl Harbor Day, then served on PBY flying boats in the South Pacific until 1943. He returned to the U.S. to train crews to serve on B24s and joined them in anti-submarine patrol out of England until war's end.

He participated in Operation Crossroads, the atomic bomb tests at Bikini Island.

After Navy duty, he went to work for the Postal Inspection Service, mostly in the Pacific area in criminal investigation. He returned "home" a year ago in September and now lives in east-north Abilene.

I joined Lou and agreed after watching the small mustard-colored planes swooping and diving around the administration building. We decided to go outside for a closer look.

We were greeted by a long burst of machine gun fire, stitching its way across the clipped grass to-

ward us. The distinctive sound of bullets thunking into the ground was almost obliterated by the sound of the small fast-flying plane above our heads. Even as we dived out of the way, I was conscious of the evenly spaced tracer bullets that left their characteristic trail of smoke curling above the entry holes in the lawn.

Lou screamed something which sounded like "those stupid bastards are shooting at US!" Then we became aware of the round red ball painted on the underside of the wing that had passed so close overhead.

Questions began to tumble about my head, as anger and fear sought to control the actions necessary to scramble back to the barracks as the only logical move to make at the moment. Would the Air Corps go so far as to put false markings on their planes for maneuvers? That red ball...wasn't that the marking for Japan? But it was unthinkable that Japanese planes would be strafing a U.S. base with live ammunition. They could kill somebody!

It became apparent that whoever it was, they were going to kill a lot of somebodies. When this realization hit home, our next instinct was to fight back. Lou and I ran to the master-at-arms shack in barracks where the only available armament was kept. It was an old World War

Please see PEARL, 22A

