

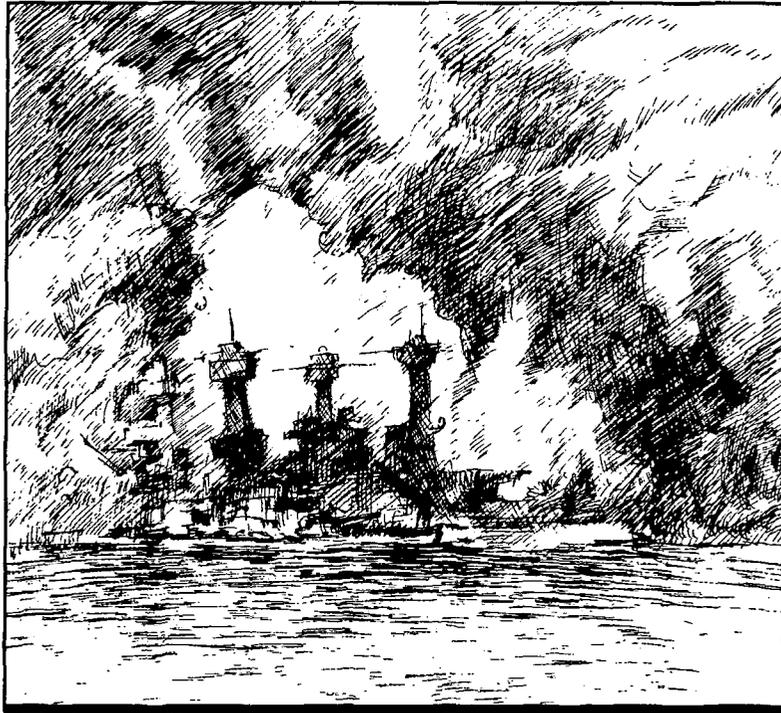
Thomas Mallon

The Golden Pearl

Infamy commemorated.

Honolulu

At 7:06 a.m. local time on December 7, 1941, the Opana mobile radar station on Oahu picked up an enormous blip. The activity was duly reported, but higher-ups told the radarmen not to worry: it could only be the big squadron of B-17s due in from California to reinforce the base. Forty-nine minutes later the first wave of Japanese Zeroes began destroying the Pacific fleet. The B-17s, arriving later, would land amidst American antiaircraft fire.



Fifty years later to the week, the skies over Oahu are once more crowded with aircraft flying west. Plane after plane carrying members of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association is landing in Honolulu for the attack's golden anniversary, the red tailmarkings signifying not the Japanese air force but TWA. On Wednesday, December 4, all 433 passenger seats on Flight 1 from St. Louis are filled, and a traveler can look forward over dozens of septuagenarian heads—gray or bald, and capped with PHS headgear—sticking above the seatbacks.

The pilot announces that the plane today weighed 734,000 pounds at takeoff, but now, descending toward Honolulu, is hundreds of thousands less, having burned off the fuel required to carry it here. The statistics, like the instructional safety film that preceded them hours ago, carry the mind to the focal point of this anniversary, the sunken USS *Arizona*, which, at the bottom of the harbor, beneath its memorial, still holds what remains of three times as many men as are on this

Thomas Mallon's most recent book is the novel Aurora 7 (Ticknor & Fields).

crowded plane, and which every day, even now, continues to leak two or three of the million gallons of fuel that were pumped into her shortly before the attack.

“Survivor” is a term embraced today by Americans claiming triumph over a host of humiliations ranging from incest to smoke in the workplace. But the eager self-love with which the word is spoken into talk-show microphones cannot entirely dilute the word's power, and during early December, as it

appeared stenciled and stitched on hundreds of aging chests and heads, the term surely still had meaning. Separated from death by just yards and seconds and fate, these men could scarcely think of themselves as anything else. One theme of discussion at the commemorations would be whether, fifty years later, the war was truly over. The President would say yes, but individual psychologies keep their own timetables. Some of those arriving on Flight 1 might beg to differ, like the oil drops still rising from the *Arizona*, and the Allied bomb, buried near Leibnitz, Germany, which on the evening of Wednesday, December 4, according to Friday's *Honolulu Advertiser*, suddenly exploded, injuring two people and leaving a twenty-foot-deep crater.

There was a danger that December 7, 1991 would be remembered for overkill of a different sort from that unleashed in 1941: the Pacific Command issued more press credentials to journalists covering the Pearl Harbor anniversary than were given out during the Gulf War. Even so, on Thursday morning, December 5, by which time the commemorations were underway, there were hundreds

of sailors doing the same things sailors were getting ready to do on that long-ago morning when no one was paying any special attention to safety. Nowadays a lot of Navy men can be seen jogging around the base, making one realize that if an aerial attack were to happen in 1991, many would be strafed to death in their Nikes instead of killed below deck while sleeping off Saturday night. Above present-day Pearl Harbor one does see occasional dark clouds being pushed so fast by the trade winds that they might be mistaken for smoke, but the only things that drop from the skies are rainbows—great, thick, durable ones that follow sun-showers.

At 10:00 this morning, outside the *Arizona* Memorial Visitor Center, the 111th Army Band is playing at a ceremony that includes the laying of wreaths against masts symbolizing the nine state-named battleships damaged or sunk in the attack. Some junketing governors are here to see the flowers placed by a survivor from each of the ships. Taps are sounded, followed by a rendition of "God Bless America" as one has never heard it—slowly, mournfully and *a cappella*. It's one of several astute theatrical calculations that will be made this week, displays whose effectiveness is guaranteed by the emotions lying just below the skin of those who have come back. In this case immediate relief comes when the song is sung a second time, to quick, peppy, musical accompaniment, by a children's choir.

The simple monument to the sunken USS *Utah*, which lies off the far side of Ford Island, is sometimes called the Forgotten Memorial. There are no tourist shuttles to it, as there are to the *Arizona*; visitors have to ride the regular naval ferry out to Ford and then cross the island to the site of the wreck. Ford was decommissioned as a naval air station in the spring of 1962, just weeks before the dedication of the *Arizona* memorial. The jet age had rendered its short runways obsolete, and now only small private planes practice touch-and-go landings there. On the side of the island closest to what was once Battleship Row is a mix of older buildings (including a dispensary to which the wounded were dragged all day on December 7, 1941) and new construction. But further inland, on the short trip to the northwest side, one feels that the island hasn't changed at all in the last fifty years. Its small frame houses look much as they would have then. According to author Thurston Clarke, on the afternoon of December 7, 1941, "Two hundred *Arizona* dead were lined up on the lawns of officers' bungalows. Their blood soaked the ground and blackened the grass. Survivors gathered dismembered arms and legs from roofs and trees."¹ On this Thursday afternoon fifty years later, when a small ceremony is planned at the *Utah* memorial, the only unusual item on one of the bunga-

lows' lawns is a sign proclaiming it "Ford Island Yard of the Month."

The *Utah* was one of the first ships hit. She took two torpedoes to starboard and fell over on port, sinking after only eleven minutes. Fifty-five of her men went down with her. Her death, if untimely, was not the robbery of youth suffered by most of those who died inside her. The *Utah* was an old ship. Her World War I service was well behind her, and she had not had battleship status since 1932. In fact, in the months before the attack, she served as a target ship for American planes that practiced bombing runs by dropping bags of flour onto her timber-covered deck.

Dedicated twenty years ago, the Forgotten Memorial is little more than a plaque, a flagpole, and an L-shaped dock from which to observe the half-submerged hulk. Today the site gleams with a newly tarred walkway and a coat of fresh paint. What's visible of the shipwreck is so badly rusted and rotted that it probably won't last much longer. Some green shoots grow up through it, and the occasional bird lands

obliviously on one of its crumbling edges.

The speakers at this afternoon's ceremony sit on the dock, and the honored guests gather under a canopy. The wind whips pleasantly as the short talks get underway, led by a master of ceremonies who is actually Air Force: General Matthews is here

because his father served on the *Utah* in the First World War, before moving to his ship's namesake state. Senator Jake Garn, whose own father was a World War I pilot, takes his turn at the lectern to recall his mother crying with fear, when news of Pearl Harbor came, that her husband would be called back into service. The younger Garn, a naval aviator in the 1950s, used to land seaplanes here, and twenty years ago, as mayor of Salt Lake City, he came to the memorial's dedication.

Soon it is the survivors' turn. On December 7, 1941, the PHSA's Utah state chairman was aboard the USS *Medusa*, a repair ship anchored about a mile away from the *Utah*. "What are those army guys doing on a Sunday morning?" he asked himself as the bombs started dropping, a reaction he says was "pretty typical": it could only be some sort of drill, everyone thought. Don Larsen, who was on the *Utah*, follows him to the microphone in his *aloha* shirt, looking like any happy, healthy retiree on his Hawaiian vacation; but within moments he is sobbing. "What we had left wasn't worth a dime." General Matthews soothes the rawness by summing things up in military-speak: "What a stressful, difficult, challenging experience was had by all who were present." →

¹ I am indebted to Clarke's book, *Pearl Harbor Ghosts: A Journey to Hawaii Then and Now* (William Morrow, 411 pages, \$22), and to Stanley Weintraub's *Long Day's Journey Into War: December 7, 1941* (Truman Talley Books/Dutton, 706 pages, \$26.95), for some of the historical background and detail in this essay.

When a new flag has been raised over the memorial, I ask Milton Matson, who'd been sitting under the canopy, about his own stressful morning fifty years ago. Looking out through his trifocals, he tells me: "One thing that stands out in my memory is, after the ship started rolling over, I was talking to one of the shipmates there, and he says, 'Well, there's one thing about it. I won't have to wash those damned dishes this morning.'" Matson slid down the side of the ship, holding on to a 10-inch hawser. "I got my butt scratched a little bit with barnacles . . ." Eventually he was transferred to the USS *Detroit*, where he "continued to do [his] twenty." He makes it sound as if that morning at Pearl was just another part of his hitch, but then he acknowledges that this is probably his fifth trip back.

The Navy's tour boat has been especially busy the past few months; they've gotten it out as early as 4:00 in the morning to take groups around the harbor and to the *Arizona* memorial. Some of the participants in the *Utah* ceremonies, including Milton Matson and Don Larsen, who looks exhausted, are on it later in the afternoon. The guide points out sights the men never saw during their service here, such as Aloha Stadium, as well as more eternal

features of the Oahu landscape—like the Dole pineapple fields. As on December 7, 1941, there are no aircraft carriers here, and aside from some submarines that make this their port, the harbor is filled mostly with destroyers and frigates. The battleship is a naval anachronism, and the mooring blocks of what was once Battleship Row are like pedestals without statues, bearing only the names of the ships tied to them fifty years ago. The guide also directs attention to the three paths taken by the Japanese bombers, one of which runs right between the upper floors of two postwar skyscrapers.

Approaching the *Utah* from the water, one sees the side of her that wasn't visible during the Ford Island ceremony. That "side" is neither port nor starboard; it is her deck, forever capsized toward the water's surface. From this vantage the sight is more moving than it was from land. One notices the gun turrets sticking uselessly up through the water and the splintered, rotting teak wood on which the sailors walked through each peaceful day. From Ford Island the hulk seems like an accident; from the water it looks like an atrocity. The sight of his old ship brings tired Don Larsen back to life, and he politely corrects a couple of the guide's mistakes.

The *Arizona* memorial is judged by Thurston Clarke, not unfairly, to be lacking in "the necessary morbidity, the power to move even the most ignorant to tears." Anchored on two sides, it nowhere touches the sunken ship over which it floats, and for all its gracefulness is an odd-looking structure, a carved soapcake. A pattern meant to depict the Tree

of Life has been cut into it, but the resulting shapes seem, at least from a distance, peculiarly like Japanese ideograms. Alfred Preis, the Austrian refugee who designed it, visited his most famous construction yesterday, recalling that his first proposal—"a sunken sarcophagus" into which viewers would be lowered for a look at the wreck through thick glass—was considered *too* morbid.

None of this can deny the effect that Preis's quiet creation has on many visitors. (This afternoon, before stepping off the tour boat to enter it, one older man takes the trouble to comb his hair.) In the Shrine Room, beneath a tablet bearing the names of all the men still below, are small floral tributes sent from the VFW posts of little towns all across the country. Off the side, small fish swim toward the rusty gun turrets just beneath the water. Aerial photographs of the whole arrangement are eerily spectacular; the white memorial, floating perpendicularly atop the still-visible sunken ship, seems like the armature of a giant crucifix.

On early Thursday evening the memorial's deck is strewn with television cables for live feeds to the mainland, and at 5:30 its circular floor lights come startlingly to life, as if switched by those below. The huge number-3 gun turret breaks through the water, and the tiny oil slick made

General Matthews soothes the rawness by summing things up in military-speak: "What a stressful, difficult, challenging experience was had by all who were present."

by each day's escaping fuel is visible. The spectrum of shiny colors it makes under the setting sun is pretty, though nothing to match the actual rainbow that has just dropped over the enormous ship nearby, the USS *Missouri*, which sailed into the harbor this morning, and upon which, forty-five months after the sinking of the *Arizona*, the Japanese empire surrendered to the United States of America.

The corner of Leuwens Street and Kalakaua Boulevard is a good place to watch the PHSA's big parade on Friday morning. Whenever one of the sudden showers falls, you can duck into the McDonald's (offering the McTeri-Burger Deluxe, as in teriyaki), and re-emerge to hear a small cheering section of older women break into one more round of "Let's Remember Pearl Harbor." The heartier men walk behind banners identifying their old ship or their PHSA chapter, and the frailer ones come by on trucks. A contingent of former marines actually marches, in time, looking smart.

During a lull, when some space opens up between units, one woman on the corner moves over to let a girl walking a bicycle cross the street. The girl says, "Excuse me," but she was in a hurry, and the woman, upon noticing her Oriental features, can't stop herself from laughing and saying to the man next to her, "Still pushy." The girl will never know she's been made a surrogate Japanese for one of the many nervous little ethnic jokes the week produces.

The PHSA is taking care to assure its perpetuation,

through an offshoot called the SDPHS—the Sons and Daughters of Pearl Harbor Survivors. They, too, are in the parade, in identifying red-and-white attire. There is probably nothing wrong with their history-minded presence—after all, even the DAR (two prissy old gals in a convertible) is here—but one has to wonder if this isn't something other than historical consciousness, if it isn't a peculiar species of co-dependency. In 1990s America, if you haven't yourself survived something, it's de rigueur to be related to somebody who has.

One offshoot of the desire to keep the memory of Pearl Harbor ever fresh is the continuing historical attention, principally from amateurs, to the question: Did FDR know? That is, did he allow the catastrophe to take place because he saw it as the certain way to get America into the war? The askers of this question are not generally so flaky as the Kennedy conspiracy-theorists, but the motivating tendencies are the same. For the Pearl Harbor contingent it is always 7:54 a.m. on that Sunday morning, a minute before the Japanese planes come through the clouds, just as for the JFK gumshoes the Hertz sign in Dealey Plaza says 12:29, not 12:30. General Short and Admiral Kimmel are still preparing for their Sunday-morning round of golf, and Jack and Jackie are still waving. The theorists claim as their intention the laying to rest of each disaster, something that cannot occur until the "real" truth is finally established; but their actual purpose is more like the opposite. The information is not so much hidden as hiding, which somehow makes the thrilling, sickening event forever *about* to take place. The buff can keep scanning the skies or peering over at the Grassy Knoll happy in the knowledge that this awful, sublime moment doesn't yet have to be over.

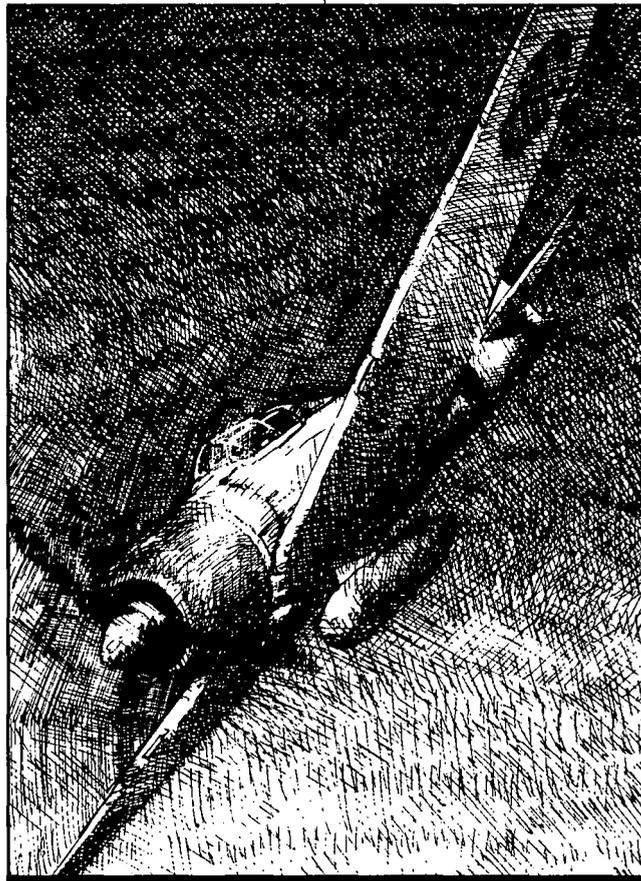
Thurston Clarke argues that the Hawaiian islands' explosive development in recent years makes it "easy to overlook how their beauty unhinged the purpose of their defenders." Paradise, made war unimaginable, and even now a paradise that's been leased and subdivided retains charm enough to let its population, temporary and resident, ignore even such benign reminders of unpleasantness as the survivors' parade. Waikiki's beach lies only a block or two from Kalakaua Boulevard, and as the parade goes by there are plenty of swimmers and sunbathers content to let it pass unnoticed. The Royal Hawaiian Hotel, looking much as it did

when it opened in 1927, is ready with *mai tais* for survivor and sybarite alike.

It is, just as incongruously as fifty years ago, Christmas season, and on Friday night the Public Workers' Santa Parade will feature floats that are really city trucks from agencies like the Board of Water Supply. President and Mrs. Bush will be checked in at the Hilton Hawaiian Village, but the more important long-range news for the hotel appeared in Wayne Harada's "Show Biz" column in the December 5 *Advertiser*: "Don Ho ends his affiliation with the Hilton Hawaiian Village when he closes tomorrow evening at the Dome. He'll reopen Dec. 22—and launch a new era—at the Hula Hut on Beach Walk . . ."

As the old men in the parade go by, atop their trucks and behind their banners, dozen after dozen of them, one realizes that as much as anything else they are still-living monuments to the good life. A lot of them had been poor enlistees trying to escape the Depression. Their postwar upward mobility took them by surprise—and eventually on retirement

trips like this one. The poignancy they finally make one feel is something larger and more generalized than that which came from the disaster they endured. If they weren't survivors, if they hadn't lost buddies, if they had never seen war, never done anything more remarkable in their lives than go to the prom, they would still be touching, as evidence of what life does to all those who were once boys: it makes them old and then it makes them die.



“Reflections of Pearl Harbor” is the title of the Friday afternoon program outside the Visitor Center. Under a broiling sun, attendants pass cups of water to the older members of the sparse crowd. None of the scheduled speakers is a survivor of the attack, since this event, as James Ridenour, director of the National Park Service, explains, is designed to

show how there were more “victims of Pearl Harbor” than the people there that morning. If “survivor” is American talk-show diction, “victim” belongs to the academic lexicon. Its utterance leaves one suspiciously anticipating a sensitivity lesson, the kind of upside-down breast-beating that will make the attack have been America's fault.

The first speaker actually does something like the opposite. Alfred Preis, the *Arizona* memorial's designer, talks with the patriotic love of the refugee (in his case from Nazi-

occupied Austria), thanking the United States for "having given me life." In a pained, wheezing voice he speaks of the curious foreshadowing experiences that gave him his aesthetic sense: at five years old he was taken by his mother to the Emperor's funeral and overwhelmed by the beauty, the feathers, the music, the "display of power." A strange dream of entering a cave also shaped the imagination of this man who would one day memorialize a thousand trapped men.

Then Edward I. Ichiyama, once Pacific Area manager for the Social Security administration, talks of the "very tragic constitutional failure" of the internment of 120,000 Japanese-Americans, including his American-citizen wife, whose brother was in the United States Army. Ichiyama himself became part of "the most decorated unit in American military history," the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, whose Japanese-Americans performed such unlikely historical feats as rescuing a Texas army unit from Germans who had them surrounded in the Vosges mountains. Ichiyama and all five of his brothers and brothers-in-law received Purple Hearts, and no one would think of denying him the title the printed program gives him—"Distinguished American." But the speech he gives is a litany of victims—the radiation sufferers of 1945, the blond German youth he saw lying dead. All of their agony is impossible to deny, but one feels uncomfortable with the implied idea that it is impermissible to think of carnage suffered without also thinking of carnage dealt.

In the hours before the actual anniversary dawned, a visitor to the harbor could see the *Missouri* strung with white lights, like a suspension bridge, and hear some distant strains of music. An orchestra practicing for the morning? Or maybe a few musicians who decided to stay and jam after tonight's "Battle of Music"? (The "Battle" was a re-creation of the December 6, 1941 band contest in which the *Arizona*'s placed second, earning the right to sleep late—which would mean forever—below deck.)

The parking lot behind the Consolidated Media Center is filled with satellite dishes for the morning's coverage. If satellites had existed fifty years ago, no one would be here now, but any reporters wishing to ride up to the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific—the Punchbowl, located in the crater of an extinct volcano—will have to be on the bus by 3:00 a.m., with instructions that, of the more than 36,490 graves there, only those of Ernie Pyle and Col. Ellison Onizuka (the *Challenger* astronaut) may be photographed. The grave markers are flat in the ground, in neat rows, just like the suburban houses the World War II GIs returned to buy and live in. Big flags brush the sides of the bus as it climbs and comes in sight of other buses, and more buses, and more still—all of them chartered to bring the survivors and their families up the mountain. Aging men and women step out of them on balky knees and look around in

the chilly darkness. A marine bugler quietly rehearses taps, as the stars shine on in the night sky.

At 6:15 the band is playing the peppy march from *Bridge Over the River Kwai*, and people in the crowd inevitably begin whistling, conscious or not of its being fifty years ago to the minute that Admiral Yamamoto's planes were completing their carrier takeoffs for the 230-mile flight to Oahu.

The presidential motorcade makes its timed arrival at sunrise, blue-and-white signal lights flashing like sparklers, up along the esplanade, past the flags, past the crowds from the charter buses. After some mournful music and taps, George Bush's speech seems strangely throwaway. Neither the microphone nor the rhetoric is turned up high. There is a paragraph apologizing for the internment of Japanese-Americans; a quick tribute to those who fought "the cause of Korean and Vietnamese freedom"; mention of a Hawaiian boy who died in Desert Storm. Even with allowance made for the setting, the President's delivery is so completely unemphatic as to feel unseemly, at odds with the substance of his text. There is no applause until it is over, and an hour will pass before one realizes that George Bush's problem is not an absence of emotions but a surfeit. Up at

Punchbowl he is husbanding them for what lies ahead, down in the harbor.

He makes it sound as if that morning at Pearl was just another part of his hitch, but then he acknowledges that this is probably his fifth trip back.

Back at Pearl, as 7:55 a.m. approaches, a weird feeling, not just silent but nervous, an awed and superstitious mood, takes hold. The "mo-

ment of silence" would probably be happening without its being on the schedule. It is broken by a roar of planes, whose location and direction are acoustically uncertain until one sees the four of them—and then, in "Missing Man" formation, only three—streaking westward above the harbor and over the *Arizona* memorial, where the President is waiting to make a speech and cast a wreath into the water. The ceremonies are for invited guests only, so the press watches them, with a big crowd of World War II veterans, over a big Panasonic TV on the Kilo 8 pier.

Right now Bush would probably like to be standing with Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, shaking hands, but a few months ago PHSA national president Gerald Glaubitz said, of the Japanese, "They weren't invited fifty years ago, and we're not going to invite them now." The organization's historian, Raymond Emory, made an analogy: "If somebody had raped and murdered our mother fifty years ago, we wouldn't be inviting them over for lunch." The PHSA's clout is such that Emory, not Miyazawa, is sitting between George and Barbara Bush this morning on the *Arizona*.

When the Japanese parliament was not able to agree on a particularly apologetic resolution, it fell to Foreign Minister Watanabe to express "deep remorse," a gesture whose incompleteness was satirized in the *Advertiser's* editorial car-

toon on Thursday. In his *Arizona* speech Bush moves away from the issue entirely, emphasizing instead the perils of isolationism (“The world does not stop at our water’s edge”), a bland enough theme, one would have thought, except for the challenge he is facing from Pat Buchanan and the new America Firsters. He also contributes, much to the liking of the PHSA, to the continuing alchemy of Pearl Harbor from debacle into triumph, speaking of the “Heroes of the Harbor,” men who “did not panic” but “raced to their stations. Some strapped pistols over pajamas—fought, and died. . . . For the defenders of Pearl, heroism came as naturally as breath. They reacted by instinctively rushing to their posts.”

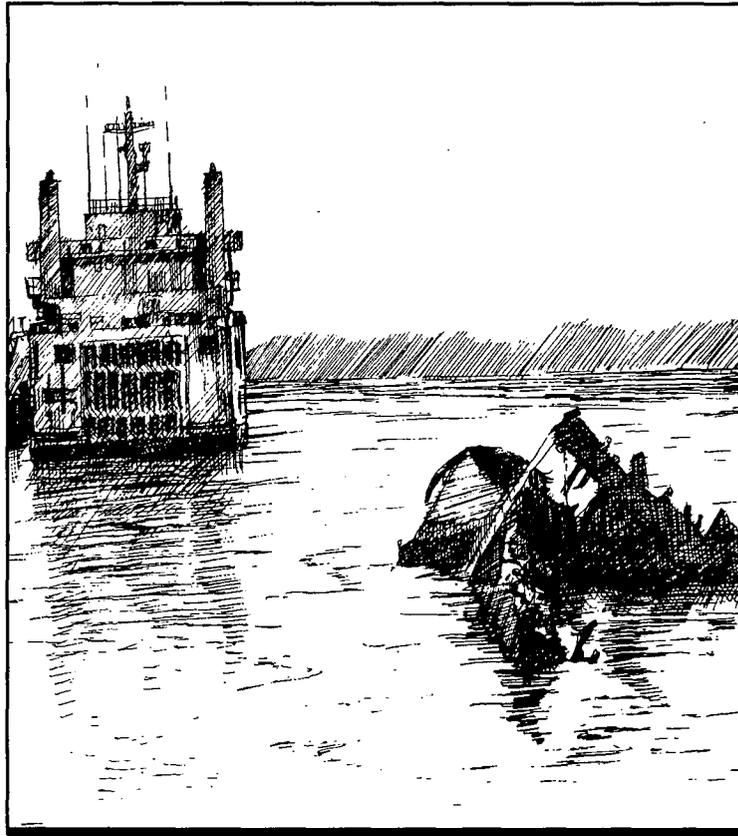
The President’s remarks memorably illustrate the way sincerity can redeem boilerplate. There is nothing exceptional about this speech other than the way in which it moves its speaker. Bush cannot, without choking up, get through his second-to-last paragraph, in which he describes how the harbor’s water, “in what now seems another lifetime . . . wrapped its arms around the finest sons any nation could ever have; and it carried them to another, better world.” The catch in his throat moves people on Kilo 8 to tears. The report of saluting rifles reaches them through the Panasonic TV before, a split second later, it arrives on the breeze.

Few veterans in the crowd on Kilo 8 remember hearing news of Pearl Harbor while “walking across the green at school,” namely Andover, as Bush recalls doing after he and the First Lady are ferried over from the *Arizona* memorial; and the President’s remark that the Japanese expression of “deep remorse” is “much appreciated” by the United States is greeted with silence. Even so, one gets the feeling that what the combative Gerald Glaubitz said about Bush at Punchbowl a couple of hours ago is true: “He’s one of us.” It’s more than his experience as a naval aviator, which has made him the perfect President for this occasion. It’s generational. His best moment comes when he gets suddenly personal, philosophical, the way one might with friends of a lifetime some summer night on a front porch. The public rhetoric turns confidential: “I wondered: what will my reaction be when I go back to Pearl Harbor? What

will their reaction be—the other old vets—especially those who survived that terrible day right here? Well, let me tell you how I feel. I have no rancor in my heart towards Germany or Japan—none at all. I hope you have none in yours.” It’s said in the vulnerable way friends have of talking about all the hands that have been dealt, and the feelings it stirs are released in applause generated by his next proud and declamatory paragraph: “World War II is over. It is history. We won. We crushed totalitarianism; and when that was done, we helped our enemies give birth to democracies. We reached out, both in Europe and in Asia, and made our enemies our friends. We healed their wounds and in the process, we lifted ourselves up.”

It remains for Bush to conjure the dead once more, this time to imagine words they might be speaking: “Don’t you think they’re saying: ‘Fifty years have passed. Our country is the undisputed leader of the free world. We are at peace.’ Don’t you think each one is saying: ‘I did not die in vain.’”

Just prior to the anniversary Frank Deford wrote in *Newsweek* that “We make a to-do about remembering it each year. But we don’t. Not really. What we actually do is: We Remember That We Remember Pearl Harbor.” There is something to this; sentimentality could, after all, be defined as the squaring of sentiment. Nonetheless, there is something to be said for trying to remember feelings once felt. If the debate over a Japanese apology has been confused, it has not been unintelligent, and it has for now saved one theater of the war from the specious moral equivalence the “healing” waters of time will inevitably bring. All history’s destiny is toward pageant: the German Protestant Princes and the Holy Roman Empire are



equally colorful, each no more right or wrong than the other, and the Civil War is eventually a chess set. But there is no point in hastening a process that, aside from its inevitability, is destructive of the truth. If the book on Pearl Harbor remains a bit rancorously open, that’s not so bad as a wrongheaded rush to Bitburg.

Nearby Hickam Air Force Base has a plush feel, like that of a well-tended college campus, with dozens of creamy beige and brown facilities and residences. What happened here fifty years ago is usually told

second or third in the story of December 7, 1941. Hickam held a modest ceremony at the base flagpole late on Saturday morning to honor its dead, and an hour later the base seemed back to normal. The only unusual sound was the departing roar of Air Force One. The portable bleachers that had been set up by the flagpole were already being folded.

But Robert ("Johnny") Johnson was still there, counting the names of the dead, twenty-nine of them from the 22nd Materiel Squadron, on the new marker. He had arrived at Hickam in September 1940 to work as a parachute rigger, and can remember being in the hospital with a broken ankle the following summer. After his release in October '41, he continued to limp for a while, "but that day I don't remember limping." That day was December 7, the day of what he refers to as the "blitz"—the bombing of the main barracks at Hickam. He had just gotten back from brushing his teeth when it started.

The Japanese planes, says Johnson, would fly down behind the hangars. Then "they'd turn around and they'd strafe on the way back."

Sharing a memory frequently spoken by survivors, he says he "could see those guys sitting, the two of them in each plane, just sitting there, their heads. I could see them as they went by." It was the last strike that hit the barracks. "I got blown up in the air and I sort of came down on my neck and shoulder, and it

felt like the shoes had gone off of my feet. . . . I was asking the Fellow Up Above to help me get by or get through, and after that I always said, 'Well, if they never got me that day, they're never going to get me.'" Johnson would spend part of a long war—he was discharged in the summer of 1945—in the Gilbert Islands.

He first returned here in 1971 for the PHSAs national convention, and he's returned to the islands a number of times since. What he's liked least about this current trip is the jam-packed overdevelopment of Waikiki and the talk he hears of how it was the Navy that really won the war. He acknowledges "lots of good memories, and a lot of bad memories." Among the latter is one from the mess hall, which he says could seat 900 airmen at once: "A kid from my hometown was there. He was a cook, but he wasn't on duty that day. He was making him a lunch to go hiking, and of course he got blown to bits. That was his birthday, 23 years old that day. Lawrence Carlson was his name." He enunciates it precisely, making sure I've got it right.

The men leaving Honolulu, in plane after plane on Monday, December 9, have mostly retired from whatever work they took up in 1945. But once again they are going home. Their eastward flight path is taking them closer to the wreck of the USS *Oklahoma* than they

have been anytime this weekend, for the *Oklahoma* lies 540 miles northeast of where she first sank after taking nine torpedoes on the morning of December 7, 1941. Like most of the ships that went down in the attack, she was eventually raised. The others were returned to service, but she was too far gone for that, and so in 1947 she was towed east toward a scrapyard. As if in protest against such a fate, she sank a second time, before arriving at her destination, and she's never been raised since.

While she was still on the bottom of Pearl Harbor, some of the sailors trapped inside made marks on the bulkhead showing that they lived on until at least Christmas Eve.

"Don't you think," asked President Bush about the fallen, that "each one is saying: 'I did not die in vain.'" Eventually, perhaps, the spirits of the *Oklahoma* knew or felt that, but not in those seventeen days, as they breathed the last of the pocketed air over and over. They may literally not have known what hit them, much less its historical meaning. Peace and satisfaction must have been a long

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time coming, just as they were to many of these survivors, still alive, flying homeward. When the President shouted, with true feeling, that "We crushed totalitarianism," a part of him knew he was telling only a half truth. The occasion permitted no reference to what another President called the "long twilight struggle" of a "hard and bitter

peace," the one that began with an expedient handshake over the Elbe.

Nonetheless, some of the men flying home in this steel tube, away from all those sunken ones, must be taking satisfaction in the news, heard on hotel televisions as they undressed after last night's dinner at the Sheraton, that the Soviet Union, born when most of them were, has for all intents and purposes ceased to exist. Any sort of boasting about this, during the past two years, as its inevitability grew clear, has been almost forbidden by some national feeling of what is proper. A lot of men in this generation, no doubt because of the war, never had much taste for demonstrativeness in any case. I can remember, years ago, hearing the man who had once been Sgt. Arthur Mallon of the United States Army tell me how it was on V-J Day that he returned to New York after his three years in England as a medic. What did he do? I wanted to know, assuming he had rushed to Times Square to kiss the same nurse in Alfred Eisenstaedt's famous photograph. No, he just got a haircut before returning to his mother's house, which he'd last seen in 1942, and going to bed. Even so, if he were still here, I suspect he would join in marveling at the world's growing resemblance to the envisioned one for which he was asked to fight. □



L.A. Recession

by Benjamin J. Stein

Friday

A call at 8:00 a.m. from my pal, B., the lovely, sprightly gamine of 25 who used to work for me before going on to greener pastures at a large publishing company. "I'm so scared," she said. "It's Christmas, and I'm totally broke. I'm thinking of taking a night job as a waitress, even though I'm chronically fatigued and totally exhausted and really sick. I have to do it because I don't want to disappoint my nephew and my mother by not having nice presents for them for Christmas."

"This sounds really sad," I said. "Can I help in any way?"

"No," she said. "I know you're really, really worried about the economy, too, and about yourself."

"Well, I was worried," I answered, "but my father told me that we're only about 1.4 percent below our cyclical employment peak, so I'm completely in the clear about my future."

"You are?" she asked breathlessly. "You really are? In that case, can you give me a hundred dollars? That'll be my Christmas present."

"I had actually planned to give you a copy of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*," I said. "But if you really want the hundred bucks . . ."

"Well, I sort of need it," B. said. "I have to get my hair cut and colored this afternoon at José Eber's, and I had to wait two months to get the appointment, and now that I have it, I sure don't want to lose it because I don't have any money. My grandmother's going to lend me the rest."

"Maybe if you're broke, you shouldn't get your hair cut and colored for \$250 at José Eber's," I suggested.

Benjamin J. Stein is a writer, lawyer, economist, and actor living in Malibu, California.

"I have to," she said. "Because I'm going to Aspen for Christmas, and I'm going to Don Simpson's birthday party, and I want to look really great."

I got up and fed my dog, Trixie. She ate her food and then went to sleep, proving that dogs really are the best economists.

As I was walking around my house thinking about the best way to measure risk in bonds, I had a visit from my neighbor, Jane, the artist.



"I'm leaving here," she said. "I hate it in Malibu, and I hate it in Hollywood. All anyone ever talks about is the recession. Meanwhile, I'm so broke all I want to do is hide. I have to pay for my gas with my American Express because I have literally no money at all in my checking account. Nobody's buying my paintings anymore. Even the one I thought up, the 3-D version of Magic Johnson at his press conference, even

that I can't sell. Everyone's broke, and it's all anyone talks about, so I'm leaving town."

"To get a job? To maybe go back to school?"

"No," Jane said, looking at me with surprise. "To go to the south of France to take art classes. I've been looking at ads for villas near Nice. There's a really fine art school there, and I could take classes all day and cook all night. The light there is fantastic."

"Just out of a stupid curiosity," I asked, "how will you pay for this?"

"Well, I have this C.D. that I always thought I'd use as a nest egg for my children's college, but what the heck, they're both really good guitar players and probably won't even want to go to college . . ."

"So you're going to use the last money you have in the world to go to France and take art classes?"

"Well, what's wrong with that? It's the recession, and everybody's really down, and I can't stand it."

"What if the recession is still going on when you get back from France?"

"I'll just turn around and go right back," she said. "Or maybe to Spain."

I took Trixie out for a walk and looked at the billboards for movies. It's an astonishing thing how many of them have women holding guns and looking happy. I'll definitely have to point this out to my doctor.

As I passed by Azzedine Allaia, a dress shop for wealthy rock 'n' rollers, I ran into my friend Allen getting out of his Jaguar convertible. He looked remarkably fit and healthy. "Allen," I said. "I am so glad I ran into you. You look so great, and everybody I know is so down about the recession." →