

Punchbowl, Pearl Harbor and my Grandparents



Peter Silva, 2015-07-12

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In honor of Pearl Harbor day, I want to share a bit of history you might not know about. This has nothing to do with technology, security or current trends but felt compelled to honor my grandparents along with service men/women everywhere today. I am Hawaiian (1/8th, direct from [Kekaulike](#) line). I was born there and most of my ancestors lived there while it was still a [Monarchy](#). My great and present grandparents all were born and raised and some witnessed the great destruction that day, 74 years ago. A shell even landed in my grandmother's backyard while they were at church that Sunday! Both my grandfathers played a significant role in the days and weeks following the bombing. My paternal grandfather was a carpenter and lived in Pauoa Valley (O'ahu) which is situated right next to Punchbowl, the [National Cemetery of the Pacific](#). While many equate O'ahu with Diamond Head ([Leahi](#) – Brow of the Tuna – to the Hawaiians), Punchbowl is also an old volcano that helped create the island. When my grandfather was a kid they used to play there and he spoke of many fun times running around inside Punchbowl as a youngster.



When Pearl Harbor was hit, many locals were called (and wanted) to help, as you can imagine. As my grandfather tells it, they needed a place to temporarily put those who had died in the Pearl attack and Punchbowl was both the closest (about 15 miles), had the space and was known as the 'Hill of Sacrifice' to the ancient Hawaiians so it had historical significance. Being a carpenter and living less than a mile from Punchbowl, he was part of the team that built the wooden caskets for the [2400 fallen](#). As the days went on and suitable re-locations were not available, they decided to start properly laying to rest those who had perished – right there at Punchbowl. The Pearl Harbor victims were among the first to be buried there, 776 of them. About 8 years later, they officially dedicated it as the [National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific](#) – it's the [Arlington](#) for the [Pacific Fleet](#). Those who have served in the [Pacific Fleet](#) have their choice of Virginia or Hawaii as their final resting place.

My maternal grandfather, who happened to be a Honolulu Detective at the time, was born in Yokohama (although not Japanese) and had learned Japanese while attending school there. He moved to the Hawaiian Islands with his parents when he was still a teenager and grew up on the [Big Island](#). Since he understood Japanese, the US Government assigned him to guard the Japanese consulate when the US declared war. He really didn't like the assignment since he had become friends with staff due to being a local police officer and had fond memories of being Japan. After the attack, there were curfews and blackouts, and my grandfather had to make sure there was still a little illumination but nothing too bright inside the consulate. One evening as he was covering an exposed light bulb with a mimeograph carbon copy he pulled from the garbage, he noticed the backwards Japanese characters of some correspondence. As he looked closer, it contained information of about the locations of ships and other munitions stationed at Pearl Harbor, which became a key piece of evidence as they started to piece together what happened.

As the years roll on and those who witnessed the Pearl Harbor attack become memories themselves, I offer these couple short stories to the Internet to file, store and recall whenever someone wonders about all the little back stories of this significant event in our history.

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