War Stories Retold

This week, I had a chance to renew acquaintance with return guests Jack and Virginia Shultz at the Outrigger Reef Hotel. Besides being life-long friends, there is a very special connection -- Jack’s parents came to my parents’ home for breakfast on the morning of the Pearl Harbor attack. The following story has been told before, but I hope that long-time readers of Saturday Briefing will indulge me, as I tell it again in honor of the Shultz family’s visit -- and of all the men and women of our armed forces who, like John and Jack Shultz, have defended our country’s freedom, risking their lives, many of them doing so even today, in far-flung places like Iraq and Afghanistan.

On December 7, 1941, I was a nearly eight-year-old boy living with my parents Roy and Estelle Kelley and sisters Jean and Pat in a small house on Kuhio Avenue. The building is still standing, right next to the former OHANA Surf Hotel, a tribute to my father’s talents in architecture and construction.

On the morning of December 7, my parents were looking forward to having breakfast with a young Navy officer and his wife, John and Martha Shultz. My mother prepared her famous Sunday waffles while my father carted my sisters and me off to St. Clement’s Sunday School in Manoa in the family car.

We were dropped at the curb outside St. Clement’s about 8 a.m. When we walked inside the parish house, I distinctly remember there were no other children there. The lone Sunday school teacher asked, “Why are you here? Don’t you know there’s a war on?”

In Waikiki, Commander Shultz was getting his own introduction to war. Legend has it that he arrived for breakfast in his dress white uniform and told my mother that there was a crazy guy out in the street in his pajamas babbling about an attack on Pearl Harbor by Japanese aircraft.

Perhaps then they turned on the radio and listened to Webbly Edwards’ famous announcement, “This is the real McCoy!” Commander Shultz left in a flash, heading off to war in his dress whites.

My father retrieved my sisters and me from church and drove us to Waikiki. In spite of the danger, curiosity got the best of us, and we went to the third-floor patio to see what was going on.

I can distinctly remember looking in the direction of Pearl Harbor and seeing a huge black cloud rising from the ground. We could see aircraft circling and diving. Black puffs from exploding anti-aircraft shells filled the sky and louder rumbles told us that something really big was happening.
Then there was a momentary high-pitched whine just before Kuhio Avenue exploded about a block away.

At this point, curiosity turned to panic, and we scrambled for the protection of the half basement below the three-story wooden apartments my parents had developed across Kuhio Avenue. We huddled between the suitcases and steamer trunks, not knowing what was next. Our greatest fear was that an invasion would quickly follow. We had nowhere to go. My mother made several quick trips across the street to gather emergency supplies like soup and bandages.

We were relieved when night fell, and there was no sign of further activity. We settled down to try and sleep, not knowing what the next day would bring.

We kids were thought to be fast asleep, when five-year-old Jean sat bolt upright exclaiming, “I smell whiskey!” She certainly did. My mother and perhaps Martha Shultz, emotionally drained from the extraordinary events of the day, had broken into the “medicinal” supplies that had been brought over from across the street.

After December 7, Commander John Henry Shultz was assigned to Australia, where he was involved in setting up a base system for operational support of U. S. naval forces. While there, he was promoted to captain. After two years Down Under, he returned to the mainland to take command of the USS Mount Olympus, an amphibious command ship that later participated in the Leyte and Lingayan Gulf amphibious landings that paved the way for the liberation of the Philippines.

John and Martha’s son Jack Shultz attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and served as an infantry battalion commander in Vietnam roughly three decades after Pearl Harbor.

Jack and Virginia have been our guests at the Outrigger Reef Hotel this week, along with their daughter and son-in-law, Mary and Jim Black. They have had a wonderful time and cannot say enough about the hospitality shown by every member of our ‘ohana with whom they have come in contact.

It was great to be able to spend a few moments with them and share some stories about the day just over 64 years ago when Hawaii, along with the rest of the nation, went to war.