Pearl Harbor Attack
65th Anniversary

Last Thursday marked the 65th anniversary of the December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor and Oahu, Hawaii. Fewer and fewer who were on Oahu that day remain alive today.

One well-known survivor of the attack was pilot Kenneth M. Taylor, who was able to get his P-40 fighter launched and attack the incoming Japanese planes. Taylor got two confirmed kills and fellow P-40 pilot George Welch got four. Sadly, Kenneth Taylor passed away on November 25 at an assisted-living residence in Tucson at age 86.

My sisters, Jean Kelley Rolles and Patricia Kelley, and I are the last living members of our immediate family who personally witnessed what President Franklin D. Roosevelt memorably called the “Day of Infamy.” I have written my own personal recollections of the attacks on Oahu several times in this space. This year, I asked my sisters to jot down their memories. Printed below are Patricia’s memories and observations. Because of space limitations, we will have to print Jean’s memories at a future date.

I would also like to call readers’ attention to some fascinating, previously untold stories about Pearl Harbor that were published Thursday in a special section of the New York Times. They can be found online at www.nytimes.com/opinion/opinionspecial/index.html.

Patricia Kelley’s Memories

I was only 4 years old when the attack on Pearl Harbor happened, but even though I was very young, I haven’t forgotten that day and the lessons learned.

It was a long time ago, and today I am surprised that relatively few people understand the true significance of December 7, 1941, a day that changed my life—everyone’s life—so drastically. The attack on Pearl Harbor was equivalent to 9/11 in my day (both were unprovoked, surprise attacks with a roughly comparable death toll), and, when the commercial jets crashed and destroyed lives and property in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania a little over five years ago, it was a real déjà vu experience for me. My heart sank as I realized we were being attacked again without any idea something like that could happen once more.

In 1941, Hawaii was a peaceful, tranquil place, and then suddenly our world turned upside down. The day started like our usual Sunday in Waikiki, where we were living. Mother and Daddy, Roy and Estelle Kelley, had overnight guests, and my mother’s famous waffles were on the menu for breakfast, to be served after we three young ones (Richard, almost 8 years old; Jean, 6 years old; and myself) went to Sunday school.

On the way to church, we heard loud noises, saw some planes, and saw some smoke. Father told us that it was another of many “war games” that the military was doing and that it wasn’t anything to be upset about. Little did we know that this was the first wave of Japanese planes bombing Pearl Harbor.

Daddy drove us to the Parish of St. Clement, located a block Ewa of Punahou School on Wilder Avenue. On arrival, Richard, Jean, and I split up by age and went into our respective Sunday school classrooms. Actually, I didn’t have a classroom, but a bunch of us younger children were practicing for the Christmas play, and we were sent to the new nave of the partially built main church building.

My father drove back to Waikiki. The McCully Boulevard bridge across the Ala Wai did not exist in 1941, so he went down McCully, turned right on Kapiolani Boulevard, and then left to go across the canal on “Beach Road bridge,” as the Kalakaua Avenue bridge was known at that time.

As he approached our home on Kuhio Avenue, he saw Mother running and frantically calling to him to return to St. Clement’s and get the children. The Japanese were attacking Pearl Harbor! This was not on the radio yet, nor was the attack common knowledge. My mother had received the information from our military houseguests who had just been called to report to duty at the base.

Father arrived back at the church, ran inside, and shouted at the top of his lungs, “Go home, we are being bombed!” I remember being mortified that he was shouting in the church, as we had all been told it was the house of God, and we had to be quiet there. Father gathered up Richard, Jean, and myself, we jumped into the family car and headed back towards Waikiki.

We started down McCully Boulevard and, when our car was at the intersection of Beretania Street and
McCully, the building right next to where we had stopped, exploded and burst into flame. We went another
block down the road, and, about a block away, there was another loud noise and more fire, as a Japanese
language school was hit.

By this time, we were driving quite fast and somewhat erratically. When we got to the Kalakaua bridge, we
preceded up Kalakaua Avenue until we came to Kuhio Road (now called Kuhio Avenue), where the Piggly
Wiggly grocery store was located. We then went up Kuhio, stopping for the intersections, with Father shifting
gears roughly at each cross street, driving as fast as he dared to go.

Our car stalled at the corner of Lewers Street and Kuhio Road, and after much fuss, Daddy got the car
going again, and we pulled away from the intersection. When we had gone half a block, there was a loud noise
behind us, and where our car had stalled, there was now a large hole in the road.

These explosions may not have been Japanese bombs. Many were probably what we call today “friendly
fire.” Some of the anti-aircraft shells being fired from Pearl Harbor were improperly fused and were coming
down on the civilians of Honolulu. Thus, the survivors of Pearl Harbor were not just the members of
military located on bases, but Oahu’s civilians as well. Many civilians lost their lives, and many were injured.
Many lost their homes. There are few, if any, records of the actual numbers, as the military declared this
information secret.

When we arrived at our home in Waikiki, we hurried up to the third-floor patio and watched the second
wave of Japanese planes come around Diamond Head. They had already hit Bellows Field, near Waimanalo,
and were on their way to hit Hickam Field (now Hickam Air Force Base) and Pearl Harbor again. I
remember seeing the planes with the “meat ball” Rising Sun marking on the side, and I remember the puffs
of smoke from our anti-aircraft fire in the sky.

Then there were more explosions in the city. One explosion was close to our home and pieces of the
shell zoomed by my brother and me and landed on the patio tile.

After that close call, we were all hurried down the stairs, to a basement in one of our two-story
apartment buildings across the street. Under the apartments, there was a half-basement area with a dirt floor
and dirt walls. There were some shelves where our tenants stored their luggage and my parents stored extra
beds.

We pulled some bedding off the shelves, placed them on the dirt floor, and sat on the mattresses. Father
had missed his breakfast and asked our housekeeper to go back across the street to our home and get the
bowl of waffle mix and the waffle iron. At first, she wasn’t about to go, but eventually Daddy talked her into
it. I think she was more frightened of him than the bombs.

We finally had our waffle breakfast, sitting on a mattress on the dirt floor in the basement, while the noise
went on outside. Someone had the presence of mind to bring the radio, so we listened and heard what was going
on. I remember announcer Webley Edwards telling us, “This is no drill.”

The adults talked about what to do and what could happen. When night came, we settled on top of
the mattresses and snuggled close to one another. Mother came over to the mattress where I was and
taught me the Lord’s Prayer. Up until then I had always said the children’s prayer, “Now I lay me down
to sleep.” That night she insisted I learn every word of the Lord’s Prayer and said, “Patsy, I do not know
what will happen, but if we become separated I want you to say this prayer every night, and we will be
together for I will be saying it too.”

The next day, fully expecting that Japanese troops would be landing on Oahu, we left Waikiki and
headed for the hills. We went to the top of Mt. Tantalus and stayed in the woods next to a home of a
friend of the family. We eventually moved into their place, and stayed there until all the rumors of an
invasion died down.

December 7 was just the first day of several years of military rule in Hawaii. Martial law was declared
that afternoon and lasted nearly three years, until October 24, 1944. It was a military dictatorship. We
lost all our rights as Americans, and for a while, even lost our money until the government over-printed
our dollars with the word HAWAII on them. In the meantime they issued us colored scrip, like the scrip
you use to take a carnival ride. This was our currency to buy food, get gas, buy clothes, all of which were
rationed even tighter than on the mainland.

It was a time we carried gas masks, and everyone was issued an identity card, even though this was
possibly in violation of U.S. law. We had blackout each night, and all our windows had to be covered with
a thick black cloth. That, of course, kept the cool tradewinds out, and it was hot and humid inside our home. No cars could be on the road at night, and if you had to drive for a war effort job, your headlights had to be covered, allowing only a slit of light to show.

We had to dig a trench as a bomb shelter in our yard, and later kept a “Victory Garden.” The military strung barbed wire all over our beaches, which were basically off-limits to civilians. They put up concrete machine gun nests along the beaches around Oahu and big guns on Diamond Head and at Fort DeRussy in Waikiki. When they practiced firing this artillery, the noise was deafening, and more than once, the sound shattered windows.

The military marched into Punahou School and took over the campus. The school held classes in private homes until the administration could arrange a place for its students at the University of Hawaii.

I was too young for school, but I remember Father taking me up to Wilder Ave to see the rock wall surrounding Punahou and its formerly beautiful hedge of night blooming cirrus plants, which had all been cut down and replaced with barbed wire by the military. It was so sad to see.

My kindergarten class was the first class permitted to return to the Punahou campus in late 1944. The school’s fields were covered with Quonset huts. In fact, my classes were held in one of them. Each day the military would come by and spray for mosquitoes. Often that was done while we were outside having our morning snack. When I came down with cancer years later, I wondered if the DDT in that spray was related to my illness.

I could go on for a long time about many other events that happened in the war years. My father wanted me to know that this drastic change had happened, and he took me everywhere to see the changes and taught me what they meant. It was a living history lesson that I will never forget.

At the very strong suggestion of the military, our family and others left Honolulu as soon as transportation could be arranged. We departed in February of 1942. We children and mother were evacuated in a Pan American World Airways “flying boat.” Father was required to stay in Honolulu as “essential to the war effort” because he was an architect. I remember being rowed out to the plane, leaving Father on the pier. When we saw him again several months later, after the government shipped him back to San Francisco, he was totally blind from cataracts.

We returned to Hawaii in the fall of 1944 on a hospital ship, filled mostly with women and children (some men and boys), that the military was bringing back to Hawaii, along with every childhood disease that you could think of. We zigged and zagged (to elude Japanese submarines) in a convoy of many ships. The trip took nearly two weeks.

My father took the attack on Pearl Harbor and the events that followed very hard, and, in his later years, he would be upset when programs came on television about that fateful day in our country’s history. I often asked him to tell me about his experiences, as I felt it was important to him to have someone hear what had happened. He cried as he told me that when he stood on the pier watching us being rowed out to the plane in 1942, he did not think he would ever see his family again. Later, he felt that the lessons our country had learned would be forgotten, and it saddened him. In a way he was right, for today so many have forgotten Pearl Harbor.

Other lessons I learned were that family is the most important thing you have. We snuggled and held on to each other in that basement on December 7th, not knowing what our future held, but we had each other. I learned that prayers count and are heard. It helped me the night of Pearl Harbor, and it has helped through all the years since then. I learned that material things are not important. Material things you may have today, but within a second they can be gone. The love you have for one another, the caring you give one another, the support you give to everyone, family and outsiders, are far more important than money or any material thing.

Yes, it can happen again, and it has, as we know from the 9/11 attacks. Hold your family close, remember your loved ones, and help to care for others in the world, for we are all one family.