A MESSAGE FROM RICHARD R. KELLEY TO OUR OUTRIGGER ‘OHANA

Pearl Harbor perspectives

By Dr. Richard Kelley

During the past week, Pearl Harbor was much in the news as people around the world noted that 75 years had passed since Japan’s devastating assault. On television, many channels ran documentaries about the December 7, 1941, surprise attack on Hawai’i’s island of O’ahu. They covered many angles, asking who knew what, if anything, about the impending attack and when did they know it. Some conspiracy theorists contend the U.S. government all but invited the attack in order to quell a significant isolationist movement that was keeping the U.S. from helping defend the UK, a fellow English-speaking democracy, from Nazi aggression that had already overrun almost all of Europe, toppling free societies and installing bloody Gestapo rule.

Let’s put that thought aside for a moment though, because there is an interesting link between the attack on Pearl Harbor and the Outrigger Reef Waikiki Beach Resort that I would like to share with you.

I have been exchanging emails with Daniel M. Curts, who came to Honolulu with his family in early 1941, when he was a boy. He told me that his father, Commander Maurice E. Curts, was a Fleet Communications Officer in the U.S. Navy who, at that time, served on the staff of Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, Commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, based at Pearl Harbor. The Curts family lived in Waikiki in one of the Edgewater Beach Cottages. Other Navy families lived there too. Mr. Curts remembers it as a wonderful time. “I went to school barefoot and then spent the afternoons on the beach,” he wrote. (That’s what I did as a boy, too. See photo at right with my mother Estelle.)

Things changed dramatically on December 7, 1941. According to Gordon W. Prange, author of At Dawn We Slept: The Untold Story of Pearl Harbor, “Commander Curts rushed to Pacific Fleet headquarters, where he was standing beside Admiral Kimmel when a spent 50 caliber machine gun bullet crashed through a
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From 1 glass window and bounced harmlessly off Kimmel's chest, leaving a dark stain on the admiral's white uniform. Kimmel (knowing he would be blamed for not being prepared for the attack) picked the bullet up off the floor and murmured, more to himself than to Curts, "It would have been merciful had it killed me." (This incident is depicted in the 1970 film by Richard Fleischer, *Tora! Tora! Tora!* Martin Balsam portrayed Adm. Kimmel, and G.D. Spradlin played Cmdr. Curts.)

In one of his emails, Daniel Curts wrote, "After the 7th, my mother and I stayed with friends in central O'ahu until we were evacuated to the U.S. mainland. Of course, in 1955, when my father was returned to Pearl Harbor as deputy commander and then Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet (CINCPACFLT), I got to spend some wonderful summers in Hawaii while I was in law school."

I hope the Curts family was not in the Edgewater Cottages on December 12, 1941. On that day, the military test-fired the 14-inch cannons installed in Fort DeRussy, located just a few hundred yards from the cottages. The previous test firing had taken place 20 years earlier, in 1921, when there were very few structures in the area.

The 1941 test firings set off tremendous shock waves that did extensive damage in the area, particularly at the Edgewater Beach Cottages. I personally saw the broken windows and floors littered with plaster knocked off the walls and ceilings. I still have a vivid image of a light fixture hanging from a length of electrical cord in the middle of the room, torn from the ceiling by the blast.

With essentially no workers or materials available for civilian projects, the Edgewater Beach Cottages stood empty until late 1944 or early 1945 when Roy and Estelle Kelley purchased the real estate and began planning the hotel we now call the Outrigger Reef Waikiki Beach Resort.

World War II came to an end in Europe on May 8, 1945 ("V-E Day"), and in the Pacific on September 2, 1945 ("V-J Day"). The United States and its Allies occupied Germany and Japan (the principal Axis countries), introducing democracy and helping rebuild their societies and economies.* It was a most remarkable period in Western history and today these countries are leading economic powers.

In 1983 my wife, Linda, and I were members of the organizing committee for a group of business executives visiting Tokyo, one of the first of its kind at that time. As a way of expressing thanks, the Japanese government invited committee members to the Imperial Palace for tea.

The photo below speaks volumes. Just 38 years after the end of World War II, Richard and Linda Kelley from the country whose primary Pacific military base was devastated in a sneak attack by Imperial Japan, are having tea and exchanging pleasantries with Akihito, Crown Prince of Japan, two of whose cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, were obliterated by U.S. atomic bombs in an effort to quickly end the war and save countless other lives.

In the wise words of Abraham Lincoln, “Do I not destroy my enemies by making them my friends?”

*While all the Allies – the U.S., UK, France and the USSR – occupied Germany, only the U.S. UK and France introduced democracy in their zones of occupation, which were later merged into West Germany. The USSR set up a Communist Party dictatorship in its zone, later called East Germany, which collapsed with the loosening of Soviet control and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Germany was politically reunified in 1990. In Japan, the U.S. was the only occupying power. The occupation ended in 1952.