

# “I Remember When...”

Vesta Parker Will '44 views the attack on Pearl Harbor  
from Kamehameha's Kapālama Campus

On Dec. 7, 1941, I saw Japan attack Pearl Harbor from Kīna'u Hale, the junior-senior dormitory on the Kapālama Girls' School campus.

That was 60 years ago. I was 14 and a sophomore in school. I was the Class Counselor and, with other



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sophomore officers and honor students, was assigned to Kīna'u Hale because the freshmen-sophomore dormitory was full. Kīna'u Hale also had the best view of Honolulu and Pearl Harbor.

It was around 7 a.m. that Sunday morning. We had just finished breakfast and were back in the dormitory waiting to take our showers and get ready for church. While waiting for an empty shower stall, I stood by the bathroom window looking out at the city and Pearl Harbor.

That's when I saw airplanes flying over Pearl Harbor and black puffs of smoke in the sky from anti-aircraft guns at Pearl Harbor. The girls in the dorm thought it was the military on practice maneuvers until we saw a couple of the battleships blow up and columns of dark black smoke pouring out of them. We had never seen this before. Something was terribly wrong.

I remember planes flying over our school. Just about this time, someone came running down the dorm hall shouting for everyone to go to the dorm lounge immediately. Miss Nellie Word, our housemother, was calling a meeting. We pounded on the shower doors and told the girls to get out and go to the lounge right away. We all arrived in our bath robes and towels. The radio was on. The news reporters were announcing that Pearl Harbor was being attacked by Japanese aircraft and there were many American military and civilian casualties.

All of Hawai'i was placed under martial law. I didn't know what that meant at first. All I know is that all military leaves were cancelled and the men had to report back to their duty stations immediately. All civilians, except for emergency hospital, ambulance and firemen personnel, were to remain inside their homes; civilians away from their homes were to seek shelter immediately. No one was to use the phones. The lines were to be kept open for use by the military and emergency-type civilian personnel.

Miss Word told us that church was cancelled and to “remain calm.” I was so frightened. We went back to our rooms to get dressed and to

return to the lounge. The radio was kept on continuously to keep us updated on the news. It was rumored that someone saw “parachutists” dropping down behind the Girls' School Campus, probably from the planes I saw flying over us. Miss Word informed us that some of our senior boys were to guard the water tanks. They would be working in shifts and our dorm lounge would be used as temporary quarters for them. Folding cots were brought into the lounge and we provided the pillows and blankets.

The first night, all of Hawai'i was on “blackout” and a curfew was imposed. All windows and glass doors had to be covered by curtains, drapery, or heavy cardboard. No one could be outdoors after 6 p.m. All flashlights and car lights had to be covered with blue cellophane paper like the military and emergency-type personnel used.

Miss Word informed us that all civilian hospitals in Honolulu were filled to overflowing with casualties from the Pearl Harbor attack. The military was using Farrington High School as a hospital and was considering taking over our Girls' School dormitories to be used as a hospital.

The “take-over” procedures were being worked out between the Kamehameha Schools administration and the military. In the meantime, we were asked to strip our beds of all linens, to wash them and place them back on our beds for the wounded.

Our parents were notified to come and pick us up and take us home. Those who lived on the outside islands would be flown home. I slept that night on top of my bed with my clothes on. My parents picked me up the next day. On the way home we passed many military trucks loaded with red coffins. That's when I knew my life would be changed forever!

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— VESTA PARKER WILL



Vesta Parker Will today

Vesta Parker Will is Class Representative for KS '44. She is very active with her class and resides on O'ahu.

