Hawai'i Chronicles III · World War Two in Hawai'i, from the pages of Paradise of the Pacific
Bob Dye (ed.)

"We Wish to Do Our Part"

❖ Because of the color of their skin, some of us forgot Forgot that they knew about the seventh-inning stretch, read the colored comics on Sunday, liked apple pie a la mode. Forgot that they were Americans of Japanese ancestry—and not Japanese Some of us said that color would tell, that yellow was yellow, and white was white. Others said, "The Japanese are fine people, but you just can't trust them." Because their faces were different, their names strange, their parents born in Japan, instead of in England, Germany, or Pennsylvania, some were sure they just couldn't feel as American as we did Some pictured the Japanese in America as gloating over the crimson aftermath of Pearl Harbor—ready, one and all, to "stab you in the back."

America as a nation had been stabbed in the back And Americans were determined to strike back, to fight for their country, their taken-for-granted freedom, the seventh-inning stretch, the colored comics, the apple pie a la mode. Americans of Japanese ancestry had even more to fight for. They had first to prove to the skeptical millions that they were Americans, that they had the *right* to fight for America.

In Hawaii, in December of 1941, there were 160,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry, bewildered, confused, suddenly held personally responsible for the actions of a country many of them had never seen. At the University of Hawaii were Americans of Japanese ancestry serving in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps. On December 7, the ROTC was called out and many of the men enlisted in the Hawaii Territorial Guard. For six weeks, through the crisis, these men guarded and protected the vital utilities and installations of the Territory. Then on January 19, 1942, all members of Japanese ancestry were inactivated from the services of the Guard with honorable discharges

This was a paralyzing blow. The men had served the Guard and the United States loyally, with pride that they were doing their part for their country. And suddenly they were told that their services were no longer needed, when they knew there was a mammoth job to be done.

After the first wave of disappointment and frustration had passed,

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the men realized that this was no time to sit passively by and bemoan their situation They realized that they must find other ways to serve their country, they must prove themselves useful in some other part of the war effort. More important, they knew that they must prove to America her need of them and their own loyalty to her

In the last week of January a small group of those discharged from the Hawaii Territorial Guard met with a few interested and sympathetic civic leaders and discussed with them their desire to serve They asked themselves, "What can we do?"

They decided upon bold action—to petition the military governor, explain their peculiar situation, and offer themselves unconditionally for any service permitted in defense of their homeland and in the winning of the war. A meeting was called to mobilize as many of the former members of the Guard as possible—those attending the University and those in town. The petition, presented for their approval and acceptance, signed and delivered to the military governor, Lt Gen. Delos C. Emmons, was an unconditional offer of loyal service:

Honolulu, T H
January 30, 1942
Lt Gen. Delos C Emmons
Commanding General, Hawaiian
Department, U.S A

Sir:

We, the undersigned, were members of the Hawaii Territorial Guard until its recent inactivation. We joined the Guard voluntarily with the hope that this was one way to serve our country in her time of need. Needless to say, we were deeply disappointed when we were told that our services in the Guard were no longer needed.

Hawaii is our home; the United States, our country. We know but one loyalty and that is to the Stars and Stripes We wish to do our part as loyal Americans in every way possible, and we hereby offer ourselves for whatever service you may see fit to use us.

General Emmons accepted the men as a labor corps under the Hawaiian Department Army Engineers, to be housed as a unit and to work in conjunction with the army engineers. A one-day notice for preparation and mobilization was issued. The men left their jobs and withdrew from their classes to answer the call. On February 25, 1942,

the group, calling themselves the "Varsity Victory Volunteers," assembled on the steps of Hawaii Hall, on the University of Hawaii campus, for a simple aloha ceremony given by civic leaders, college officials, instructors, and former classmates.

For eleven months the Varsity Victory Volunteers were known as the Corps of Engineers Auxiliary, were attached as a company to the Thirty-fourth Combat Engineers Regiment, and were therefore directly responsible to the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

Stationed at Schofield Barracks, the Varsity Victory Volunteers built military installations, roads, warehouses and dumps, quarried rock, and strung barbed wire. Their tasks weren't glamorous; they had no rank; they weren't flying planes or carrying guns; they weren't even G.I. After more than eleven months of service, the Varsity Victory Volunteers were inactivated, on January 31, 1943. They asked to be released so that they might enlist in the United States Army with the recently formed American-Japanese combat unit.

This, in terse outline, is the story of the VVV. It is the story of men who, because of the tint of their skin and because their parents migrated to America from Japan, had to prove they were Americans. They gave that proof, but in doing so proved more than the loyalty of 150 individuals. They proved to the United States that Americans of Japanese ancestry could be just as loyal to their country as Americans of any other ancestry. And their contribution will not be forgotten in Hawaii.

The majority of the members of the VVV served with distinction in the war theaters—with the 100th Infantry Battalion and with the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Their roster had seven gold stars. Most of the men have come back from the fronts, and at least fifty-four of them have returned to the University of Hawaii, where they have organized the "Triple V Club."

Americans of Japanese ancestry in Hawaii are no longer under a cloud. Their Americanism has been proved beyond cavil. Familiar as the story is to many of us, it needs to be told to Americans everywhere, for one still hears of prejudice and discrimination against fellow Americans whose patriotic devotion is symbolized by the Triple V.

Note: *From the foreword of a pamphlet,* In Memoriam, *published by the University of Hawaii, and signed by Margaret Blegen, Charles R. Hemenway, and Gregg M. Sinclair, president of the University.*

1946—In Retrospect

EILEEN O'BRIEN

❖ Hawaii, like the rest of the country, groped its way through 1946, wrestling with grave problems such as a housing shortage and labor-management disputes. As the year comes to a close, these and other problems are far from solved. Cheering notes, however, have been the remarkable speed with which the disfiguring physical traces of war have been removed from the Islands and the sustaining optimism that eventually Hawaii is destined for unprecedented economic expansion as the air and sea crossroads of the Pacific.

The first of the year saw several "hangovers" from the war, such as the Pearl Harbor inquiry, investigation of irregularities in surplus property disposal, and the "get home hysteria" of service men stationed here. A protest meeting of fifteen thousand army men at Hickam Field was an orderly one, however, and the flare-up of men in uniform was not as violent in Hawaii as it was in Manila and other areas.

In January of this year, Hawaii's drive toward the goal of statehood was advanced a step by a visit of the U.S. House of Representatives' sub-committee on statehood. . . . While Mainland headlines concerned themselves with the shocking Degnan murder and strikes of electrical workers, packers, and others, Hawaii experienced its first approach to pre-war, ship-welcoming aloha when the *Aleutian* arrived here. Herman Wedemeyer, Hawaii's All-American St. Mary's football star, came home for a visit and was extensively leied and luaued by his fans. The same month, fifteen hundred Filipino laborers arrived to work in Hawaii's sugar plantations, which had experienced severe manpower losses during the war.

Heavy rains during February were the attributed cause of many cases of influenza, which for a while neared epidemic proportions. As the Mainland steel strike was ended, Hawaii continued to struggle

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