

## Hickam Field:

Woodrow Clark Was at Hickam Field. " I was NCO in charge of the control tower at Hickam Field in 1941. I went to Hickam Field from downtown Honolulu about midnight on the early morning of December 7th, 1941, to see if twenty-one Flying Fortresses, B-17E's, that were taking off from Marsh Field, California, were on the way. I found that the planes had already taken off from Marsh Field, California, headed for a final destination of Clark Field in the Philippines that they should arrive between 7:30 and 8:30 that day at Hickam Field. I went to my home and reported for duty at my station about 7 o'clock, Sunday morning. I wore civvies because my only responsibility there that morning was to see that the men on board were safely taken care of and extended the hospitality of the command.

We saw that everything was in order for their reception and I sat down to read the Honolulu Star Bulletin. Lt. Hoskins, the Operations Officer, came and got my radio log and asked me if we had planes in the vicinity of a certain point in the Pacific. And, I told him I would check with the Squadron Commander and see if those were our planes in that vicinity. Which I did and found that we did have some of the twenty-one Flying Fortresses in that particular square. He went back and reported to the Filter Board, the central records keeping area, as to where our ships and our planes that were in flight were located at any given time. We found later the Japanese also had planes in that vicinity, but theirs were flying at about 500 feet above the water level in order to hide from the radar behind the curvature of the earth. In retrospect, it was agreed that those probably were our planes the radar picked up.

At about 7:30, we noticed planes coming in over the Koolau Mountain, to the east of Honolulu, making a beeline for the Pearl Harbor area. They started dropping chemicals or bombs or something - we did not know what. And, we saw black smoke start pouring up out of the harbor. Some men in the tower said, "Well, it looks like the Navy is getting ready to smoke-screen out Pearl Harbor again." But, I said, "That's not white phosphorus that's



coming up. That's black smoke. Those are enemy aircraft." They came on around. We had a large aircraft assembly plant there to the due west of the Control Tower. The Control Tower was situated right in the eastern end of the hangar line where they begin to drop bombs on the Hawaiian assembly plant (HAD, Hawaiian Air Department). We had a large barracks that had twelve acres of force base on three levels and the Japanese light craft



## December 7, 1941

came and poured incendiary bombs on the end of that and set it on fire and the entire roof of it started ablaze. The men, oh, about 4,000 of them that were in the barracks came boiling out some of the eight entrances to that large barracks. And as they came boiling out, the Japanese machine gunners opened up on them and mowed hem, down like oats falling down, there at the doors. I happened to remember that we had planes coming in, any minute - three of them came on in and had cut off their radios before they could receive the warning that we were under attack.

I tried to warn them, "Do not land at Hickam Field! Do not land at Hickam Field! We are under enemy attack of some type and it looks like it is Japanese aircraft because they have a big bright red ball underneath their wings." And, while I was, of course, communicating with the aircraft, they told them to land at some field, landing field, or sugar cane patch or if their fuel gave out before they could fly to some other field, to make a crash landing wherever it appeared to be the safest, including along the beaches. We found that only about half a dozen came on in and they were destroyed as they taxied to their places. They could look down and see Hickam Field burning and Pearl Harbor burning and Wheeler Field, up close to our barracks burning. In all, we learned later, that about 240 men in the barracks got killed as they came out of the barracks or as machine gun fire cut them down on the landing mat. I had a ringside seat. The bombs got close enough that they broke out the glass of tower of the Control Building which was about three and a half stories up. Then, somehow, I mercifully went to sleep. I awakened Christmas Eve Day at Tripler General hospital, realizing that I didn't have my dogtag on, I only had civvies on--the nation's first "missing-in-action man." But it was a good thing for them to send to my parents back in Mississippi, on Christmas Eve, that I was once missing-in-action, but I had been wounded in action and I was recovering at a rapid rate.

*Woodrow Wilson Clark, born January 3, 1917, Neshoba County, Mississippi, after a short period of medical treatment, served as a teacher in the radio school at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, and as 2nd lieutenant in the Signal Corps in Iceland and England. He married Ann Wilson, had five children, earned his doctorate degree and was an ordained Baptist minister in Mississippi as well as serving in many capacities for various universities and state agencies. Woodrow Wilson Clark died on March 31, 1998.*

