

Dec 7, 1941

by Harry Zirkelbach 12-07-2010

I had mentally completed an essay on the assigned topic when I typed the heading, noted the date, decided that the December 7 date had changed the world beyond what any individual might have imagined that sunny Sunday day in Detroit Michigan.

The day was clear and unusually warm for December. The University of Detroit students I shared rooms with, had been to Church, breakfasted at the Tower Club, and were well into a touch football game on the street in front of our house. Children played on the sidewalks, and parents sat on neighborhood porches watching their brood, sipping on a soft drink or beer, whatever their choice.

Eight of us were the only ones in serious motion, following every snap of a new play.

We had a pattern, playing about two hours, then clean up and hit the books, for Monday's challenges.

We were all new to the University that September. The others were Freshmen, I a Junior transfer from a College in Erie, Pa. I had begun school when 5, so we were all about the same age. Several of us were very thin, but could run. Three on Athletic Scholarship could best we amateurs in every agility, but speed. These three were constant 'jocks' no matter the time of year. Kept in shape for their sport. Football season had just ended, and the University's Center Vince Banonos had been mentioned on a number of All-American teams, so with pride, all the male students were into playing touch football on free moments.

Early that afternoon, our landlady went into the house to get more food for her brood. When she returned she called out to us.

"The radio says the Japanese have just bombed Pearl Harbor, where ever that is."

This world changing event meant nothing to the eight of us.

Someone volunteered,
"We'll beat those Japs within a week", and we went on with the game.

The future was of no concern. We continued playing.

By evening, the attack was old news.

What was becoming known through hints, confirmed by President Roosevelt in a Joint Session of Congress, was that the Japanese had caused serious damages in Pearl Harbor

and beyond. By now we had opened maps, knew that Pearl Harbor is in Honolulu on the Island of Oahu of the Hawaiian Islands, 2,396 miles SSW of San Francisco, and that those islands were small dots anchored alone in the Pacific Ocean.

There was no way to know then that of the eight, only I, an Engineering student, would graduate on schedule, the others taken into the military through their Draft Board, or because of that threat, joining directly. That classmates would die in the conflict begun that sunny Sunday. That we would be visiting places far beyond Pearl Harbor, with names more unimaginable. That the University population would shrink by half, the remaining population the predominantly female.

And it was just as well.

For school opened routinely the next morning, unchanged by that touch football game.