

Honolulu, T.H. [Territory of Hawaii]
Sunday Morning
Between 8-9 Am.
Under Attack by an Enemy – Japan

Dearest Mother and Dad,

How can I write at such a time? I have to do something because I can see the smoke pouring up into the air from Pearl Harbor and the sound of the guns and the bombs bursting in the water right before us keeps me in such a nervous state that I must do something. John is at Pearl Harbor. He left early this morning because he was supposed to go today – they have been rushing so. I know they have hit places there because I see so much, much smoke.

The guns began some time ago but I thought they were our own usual gun fire. Then I just got nervous and went out to take a better look to discover all the smoke and just then great spouts of water began rising out of the ocean –two of which were right in front of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. The great spouts rose all about some of our battle ships and I thought that very strange to be firing so close even for practice. I just knew something was wrong so I turned on the radio just in time to hear that we were under attack by “the Enemy”. All I can think of is John down there where they are attackin[.] How do people face bravely the fact that their husbands are in places where they may be killed any day and I can’t get any news, of course, and I do not know how long it will be before I shall know anything. I love him so I can’t look into the future without him.

Later in the morning.

Another attack came and I watched it. My only comfort is being up here where I can see so much. Eight Japanese planes flew over the house on to Waikiki and out to sea. Their big red circles showed up so plainly. Lots of planes were high and the anti-aircraft tracer bullets are all over Pearl Harbor. The forts directly below us are quiet as to gun fire for the attack seems to be directed at Pearl Harbor and probably at Schoffield [Schofield] Barracks. I can see our ships guarding the entrance to the Honolulu Harbor. At times the bombs fall about these ships. Right now things are more quiet but I can still feel the jar of the big guns.

The radio gives us directions and what reports they can every few minutes. We are ordered to stay off the streets and not to use the telephone at all. All emergency units have been called together[.] We are urged to keep radios on and to stay calm. I feel much better in hand than I did. Strange as it may seem, I am not afraid to be here – only I am sick inside at the thought of what John is experiencing and praying all the time that he is experiencing something.

It is very, very windy and the clouds are traveling fast through the sky. Showers will come every few minutes in some sections of the island. But the smoke keeps rising from Pearl Harbor.

I wonder what you are hearing and I hope you won’t be too worried. I do not think that any bombs will fall around this house because they will not waste bombs on places of no strategic value. Were we living at Waikiki where forts are or near other forts and airports we would be in more danger.

Orders have just come in every strong language to keep off the streets and to keep all cars off streets. The army is getting angry about people’s slowness to respond about cars. Ambulances have been called out – trucks, certain motor boat operators, auto drivers and various other units. All policeman and fireman are being mobilized and all officers in all branches of the government have been called together. Orders keep coming over the radio.. I write right on while I listen to them. One announcement just now said all Pearl Harbor Workers called out a little time ago need not come if they have not already gone. This does not apply to John because he left hours ago before any of this started.

The Japanese maid is home with me. She and I sat beside each other on the lanai and watched the last attack.

Enemy airplanes have been shot down we have just been told. They call it a sporadic attack. From now on I suppose we shall stay in a state of emergency. Autos are to stay off the roads. I wonder how John will get home if he is allowed to come home.

I wonder if we shall have school and if we do what a lot of responsibility each one of us must assume when we won't know just what is going to happen. John and I will have to steel ourselves not to worry about each other because we may both have jobs to do that will keep us apart. I don't plan to sit at home and take care of myself alone if things get out of hand and help is needed.

I can see lots of smoke in back of the big hangers at Hickom [Hickam] Field. The big hangers do not seem to be on fire. I have to climb up onto the back part of our yard to see that much. I can only see a little from the front. I can't actually see Pearl Harbor because it sets too far back and part of a mountain slope cuts it off but I can see where it should be and where the smoke comes from.

10:30 Am

People are being told in no uncertain terms to drive cars up onto the lawns but to get off the streets.

All hardware and medical supply dealers are being ordered to their places of business. That sickens me.

Where I sit to write this I can look out all over the sea so I watch and write at the same time. No planes are in the sky right now. Lots of submarines seem to be going out. The sea looks rough.

The governor has declared us to be in a state of emergency which means the army issues the orders.

Injured are being taken to the Tripler Hospital now and certain doctors are being called for now. So many many doctors are being called! It frightens me. They must have such a lot of injured. They keep reading lists of doctors.

What I thought were submarines seem to be cruisers and destroyers. The water is breaking high over them.

Now ammunition workers are being called up. Trucks are picking them up in designated places. All trucks and motorcycles are being called out.

I shall stop writing for awhile. I must find some work to do because all I think about is what is happening to John. I know our army and navy will handle things. We can't lose. This will really unite people. I am so glad I am here. If I were on the mainland, I should go crazy being so far away from home.

All those Japanese planes that flew over the house came from in back of our house which means they came from the San Francisco side.

Now things are very quiet. There seems to be no life at all up here on our hill. I can see through the glasses that the streets are pretty well deserted. Only a few cars are moving. The report says everything is under control and that we are to continue to stay calm! I could be, if John were here.

12:30

More enemy planes have come since I wrote last. They must have dropped incendiary bombs (They were real bombs) because big fires burst out below and are still raging with great flames shooting up into the air. What I cannot understand is why we do not see all our own planes. I hope Hickum [Hickam] Field was not too severely damaged. We hear planes and then we see the tracer smoke puffs of the anti aircraft being fired from Pearl Harbor. The smoke has lessened from down there.

All civilian workers have now been called to come to Pearl Harbor. They report that the roads are opened. So, even if John were home he would not be able to stay. However, he was there during the heavy attack and that is what is keeping me so keyed up.

Friends and neighbors up on this hill have come to ask me to stay with them but I cannot. I must stay here in case any word comes to me. I am too nervous to adjust myself to another household. Jane is

here, so I shall not be alone. I have filled containers with water in case anything happens to the water. I have fixed flash lights for tonight because of course all will be blacked out from now on, I guess. We really are not prepared for that.

The radios are now off – orders from the army so we are getting no news whatsoever. I have not been able to do any work yet.

I can see many navy craft circling about all over the sea. Sometimes they cover themselves with smoke.

3PM

Still no real news only we are getting all kinds of rumors. I know nothing about John. Things seem fairly quiet but tonight things will not be so good possibly. We have seen no planes except Japanese planes and that is what bothers me. We have heard that the air fields have been pretty badly done up – both on this side of the island and on the other side of the island. A big Japanese fleet is supposed to be some miles off the island. Word came that some troops have landed. Also we have been told to store water so I have ever container I have filled. The bathtub is filled too.

People are so nice about coming in and wanting me to go home with them but I just cannot do it. I feel much better here. So I am going to stay home. John always wanted me to do that anyway because we feel our house is so much more comfortable in an emergency. We like our stoney basement.

I wonder what you are hearing. You are probably dreadfully worried and wishing we were not over here. I do not feel that way. I cannot believe that such a thing as capture is possible – only I do not like the absence of our planes. We have not heard any guns for a long time. Our land guns have not gone into action – the ones at the forts in the city below. I can see three forts from here. But neither did any land guns fire at the Japanese planes that flew over and that bothers me.

I have eaten some soup. I don't feel hungry but I knew I should eat because I was beginning to feel faint. Now I feel better.

3:20 PM

Thank goodness – someone who just got in from Pearl Harbor telephoned me to say that John is all right and that he will come home tonight. He is to be allowed to leave at 7 tonight. Now I can really rest a while in peace. I can see, too that the fires are stopped down that way and there has not been any sound of guns for quite a spell. Nothing matters about tonight if he only gets home safely. That may be hard to do because everything will be blacked out.

4:20 PM

I am still breathing sighs of relief and the neighbors are all so glad too that John is safe. They have come over so often. The men on the hill are organizing to work in shifts tonight as watchers. They stopped by to tell me when they knew I was going to be alone. They caught some parachutists on St. Louis Heights so they will watch for that tonight and for incendiary bombs. I fixed up a little supply of things in case anything should happen that meant I would have to leave this house. Now I am so relieved to know John will be coming home. But I shall begin worrying again when he is due and it is dark and I shall be afraid he is having difficulty getting home in the dark. I am not afraid for myself and hav not been at any time, even if that sounds untrue. My eyes have never felt so dry and I could not have shed a tear to save my life.

Much love and more later

--Beth

Dec 7, 1942