

# Pearl Harbor

By Jack R. Gannon

## Deaf Heritage Excerpt

Eight-year-old Bill Sugiyama and his schoolmates at the Diamond Head School for the Deaf on Oahu in the Hawaii Islands had just finished breakfast that bright, sunny Sunday morning of December 7, 1941. While most of the students went outside to play Bill decided to stay in the dormitory and read *Life* magazine. Suddenly, he started feeling vibrations and thought his schoolmates, elsewhere in the dorm, were making a racket and really roughing it up. In reality, the "racket" was being made by members of the Japanese Imperial Air Force who, at that very moment, were bombing Pearl Harbor some ten miles from the school. Few of the students and their supervisors believed what was happening until a stray shell whistled overhead and exploded in a shed two blocks away.

Alden C. Ravn, a deaf teacher, was working in the school's woodwork shop early that morning when he was informed of the Japanese attack. He had not been aware of the bombing in the distance, but he had heard the shell that had whined over the school and struck the shed. About mid-morning the school's principal came to tell Ravn that he had heard over the radio that the United States had declared war against Japan.

That afternoon the school's principal instructed the older boys to take heavy tables from the dormitories and put them around the porches and cover them with mattresses. These areas became the school's bomb shelters until underground shelters could be dug on the campus. That night the students and teachers could see the fires glow from Pearl Harbor and the first of many nightly blackouts began. All windows were covered completely and lights were turned out before outside doors were opened. Food was rationed, drinking water was boiled and everyone was required to carry a gas mask wherever they went. Children slept with their clothes on and one little boy would not go to bed without an iron bar at his side. Everyone feared that the Japanese army was planning an invasion of the islands.

School remained unofficially closed until February. Children who lived in Honolulu or elsewhere on Oahu stayed home. Those children who lived on other islands stayed at the school. They did yard work, helped in the kitchen, and performed miscellaneous jobs. When the yardman quit, Ravn assumed those duties in addition to his other responsibilities.

In early 1942 the military began urging all pregnant women from the mainland to return home. Ravn's wife signed up and was called in early April, but Ravn had to remain to fulfill his contract. He left for the mainland in June aboard a military transport in a convoy of five freighters escorted by four destroyers. The ships were required to zig-zag the first two days out to avoid possible enemy submarine attacks. On board the ship the passengers and crew slept in canvas bunks. The first night Ravn was frightened awake suddenly by a loud grinding noise. He later realized that he had inadvertently selected a bunk right next to the rudder gear housing. Every time the ship zigged or zagged he could feel a terrible noise.