

Alexander Beck #48  
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Q: Mr. Beck, How long had you been a member of the Honolulu Fire Department in 1941?

A: In 1941 I was a member for 8 years. I went in July 1st 1932.

Q: Were you on duty when the Pearl Harbor Attack began?

A: No, I was off duty and working at my house, digging holes for a fence that I was going to put up. And then I heard it over the radio that we were being attacked by the Japanese, and they were calling all firemen back to duty.

I was stationed at Palama Fire Station which is called #4 Company and I was sent down to ask to go down to Kakaako Fire Station to see Capt. Saffron(?). When I went to Kakaako Fire Station, he told me to take an Engine, pick up a crew, and myself to go back to #4 Company to put it in commission.

Well I picked up a crew, Mr. Charles Hopkins who was familiar with the fire department (he lived next to Kalihi Fire Station which is #6), I had a clerk from the Bank of Hawaii, I had a truck driver from the Honolulu Construction and Drilling Company [*H. C. & D.*] (with a one ton pick up truck), and I got three men from the city and county garbage (refuse company). And they all went up with me, so I was officer in charge and the same time operated the Engine.

We were stationed at #4 and this truck we had from the H.C.& D., we loaded up with hose - extra hose, in case we needed it. So then we got an alarm to go down. There was a call over the station radio and everything to respond to a fire; tank fire at the Honolulu Gas Co. at Iwilei fire station... uh, Iwilei Company. We went down there and they had a Company from Central there before us. So we got there and we were fighting this fire that was a hole pierced in the tank by one of the shrapnel shells. So at the time we were fighting fire we had four Japanese planes come over. They went around, looked at us, never fired any shot, and then they left. Then we put that fire out and then we were sent back to our Station.

So I went back to #4 with the Company in commission and waited until my other members came back from Hickam Field. I lost my Captain, which was Capt. [*Thomas S.*] "Tom" Macy, two men were injured; shot with shrapnel. That's Moses Kaliikane and Patrick [*J.*] McCabe. Well, when they came back there was a hole in the radiator on the Engine, so we fixed it up; plugged the hole, so they could use that Engine in commission. The hose wagon wasn't bombed.

So we stayed there and we had members from ... volunteers from the area that came in and stayed with us. So some of them stayed with us for about four or five days and like I said then we were on martial law and black out which was rough. Then trying to get food from the stores, which was closed. So we survived on what we had and bumming people on, you know, for coffee and thing like that, till we finally got something. It took about three days we got our stuff there.

Q: When that Engine came back from Hickam and you plugged up the holes, what did you use to plug up the holes?

A: I use a toilet tissue and brown soap to plug the holes in

this big radiator. Oh brother, it was a big sore. I used toilet tissue and then jammed it in the brown soap, and then that thing ran. It was in commission. There was a little leaks but she was OK until they finally fixed it all a couple of weeks later. But we had an Engine standing by in case. We used an Engine that I took up from Kakaako Fire Station.

Q: How did the black out affect you?

A: Black out was really rough. I mean uh, they were restricted as far as lights. We had to paint our windows black and black out the things; seal all the leaks, if we were using the lights at night and things like that so... just so that we wouldn't go out and then leave the lights. Then they told us to paint the headlights and tail lights black or blue with a strip 1/4 in. by 2 in. just so we can see what we're doing on the road which is hard with the black out; all the lights out and that's our headlight. The tail light was the same way. It was blacked out with a little strip and all that.

Q: Didn't give you much light did it?

A: No. We never had much light. We had little flashlight and drive slow to see and it was no help to us, but we had to go by the restrictions. We were told that we...

Q: After the attack, did they post any guard or anything like that over at the Fire Station?

A: Yeah, we had a boy from Kamehameha School. He came down in full ROTC uniform with a rifle. He came down. I can't think of his name. He came down and said he was supposed to be our guard down at the Fire Station. He stayed with us for three days before he finally went back to Kam School. That's the only guard we had.

Q: Well, anything else you can think of?

A: Well, of course trying to get food was hard.

Q: What was that like?

A: The stores in front of our place... all the stores were closed, and we got little help from the ... Anyway the neighbors; we went and asked the neighbors for some coffee and sugar like that, which they gave us. But we had a boy that his parents owned the store, so he went and get some supplies and gave it to us. And that's how we lived. We went down to the bakery and they gave me two boxes of bread because they were closing up. They were closed and I went across to the Station to ask the restaurant guy if he had any ham, you know, this meatloaf to sell us. He didn't sell us any, he gave us. He closed his restaurant after that. He couldn't get food. So finally we got this ; then we got help from the Civil Defense, in getting some food that they gave of the men that were in the Station. And that like I said we had men from the Refuse Dept., we had a bank from the bank (one of the clerks), then we had this person (Charlie Hopkins) who was working in heavy equipment for the

Federal people down at Pier 40; but he was with us.

And so, black out was really rough. We couldn't go anywhere in the evenings and finally had to go down and get pictures taken to give us a badge so can go around in case of darkness. This was a way of identifying yourself.

Q: Where did they take the pictures?

A: The pictures were taken down at the Palace ground, in the basement that was under the Civil Defense people.

Q: Those must have been pretty tense days right after the attack.

A: Yeah. You see, it was really hard on the married people. They never went home for the week after that. It was hard on the families too. And everything gotta be done during the day (laughter). At night they had civilian guards going all over and stuff like that. They would stop in the station. The black out was the roughest thing. We had to seal all the windows and all that so we worked in the darkness, except on the desk when you alarm that you turn on, but the thing would be right on the desk. (cannot understand) from the boxes if they hit that box it comes in and they have an indicator on the top that gives you the number. Then we'd have to look into the box. Then they have what they call a running tapes, the primary and the secondary. They would punch the holes in the tape so you look at the primary and you check for the secondary and sometimes it could be off. If it's right then we would have to look in the box, in the book.

Q: To see where it is?

A: Yeah. You see it goes by the number. We had running files... red book, it's uh... files. We had running files. Then we look according to the number on the primary indicator... tapes. Then we look into it and we go to the scene of the number box, you know. It could be our Station. It could be some other Station. So if it's our Station we go.

Q: Well, I appreciate your taking the time to talk to me. It's generous of you and helps our program.