

DID YOU KNOW?

This week in history . . .

The Engineers fought and lived through day of infamy?

Seven December 1941 was the opening scene of World War II, and the Army Corps of Engineers was there. At 7:55 a.m., two waves of Japanese warplanes from a naval task force about 250 miles north of Hawaii appeared over Oahu. Some headed for American warships at Pearl Harbor and the planes on the ground at nearby Hickam Field; others hit Schofield Barracks, Wheeler Field, and Bellows Field. The Corps of Engineers in Hawaii consisted of soldier-engineers in the Army's Hawaiian Department, and the Corps' Honolulu Engineer District, then part of the South Pacific Division.

Col. Albert K.B. Lyman, a Hawaii native, was the Army's Hawaiian Department Engineer with offices at Fort Shafter. He commanded the 34th Engineer Combat Regiment, the 804th Engineer Aviation Battalion, plus the 3rd Engineer Combat Battalion of the 25th Infantry Division. All of Lyman's engineers were at Schofield Barracks. These military engineers were enlarging and modernizing facilities at Fort Shafter and Schofield Barracks, building anti-aircraft gun sites, and bomb-proofing coastal fortifications. Part of the 804th Engineers were building U-shaped dirt bunkers for aircraft dispersal at Wheeler Field.

On the civil side, Lt. Col. Theodore Wyman, the Honolulu District Engineer, had offices at the Alexander Young Building in Honolulu employing 10 officers and 400 civilians. Fourteen field area offices had three officers and 200 civilians. Many district team members were at work that morning; there had been a rapid increase in defense projects after France fell in 1940. Wyman's work force was building stationary early-warning radar sites on Kauai, Maui, and Oahu, although none were operational on 7 December. The transfer of Army Air Corps construction from the Quartermaster's Department to the Corps in early 1941 also increased Wyman's responsibilities. His district took over enlarging eight airfields and building two new ones, and began work on a gasoline and bomb storage site at Hickam Field. In October, Wyman began his most important project – building an air ferry route across the South Pacific to Australia. By December, airfields were being built on Christmas and Canton islands, in Fiji, and on New Caledonia. In addition to defense work, Wyman remained responsible for civil works projects such as dredging Honolulu Harbor.

No district team members or engineers were killed when the Japanese struck without warning, but there were close calls. Paul J. Lynch, the area engineer in charge of construction at Bellows Field, watched with horror as Japanese planes strafed the field, destroying most of the P-40 Warhawk fighter planes. Lynch directed dispersal of his equipment, and because of his efforts none was lost.

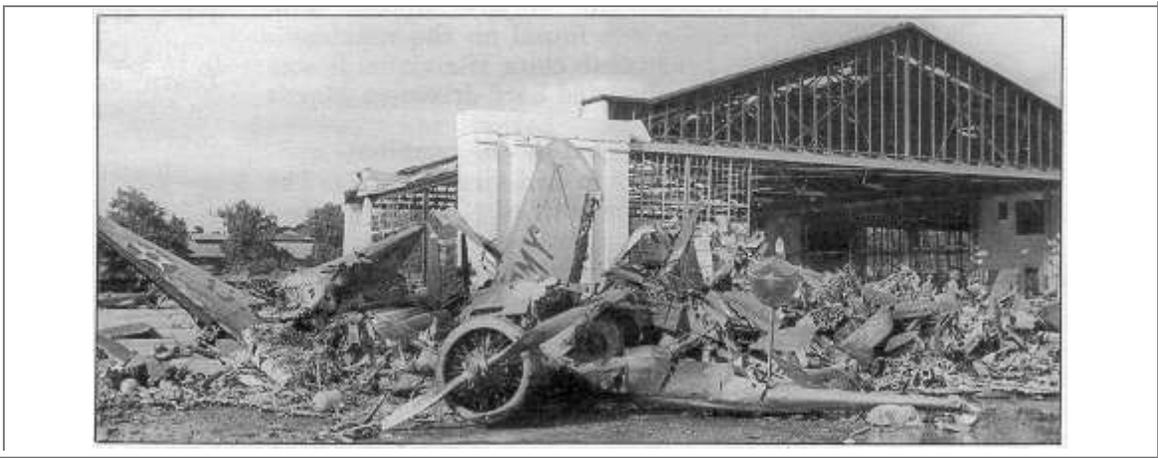
First Lieutenant Harvey R. Fraser was at Schofield Barracks that morning preparing to leave the next day, 8 December. Reassigned to the mainland, he had recently turned over

Company A, 3rd Engineers, to his successor. One of the first bomb blasts blew out a window of Fraser's house and he ran to get his pistol to shoot at the low-flying planes, forgetting he had already turned in his weapon. Fraser hurried to Schofield Barracks where the battalion commander gave him back Company A. He found his men in the street shooting at attacking planes. Fraser told the supply sergeant to give weapons to anyone who asked and to tell them to shoot at the Japanese planes. Later, Fraser almost had to pay for the weapons because in the haste to go to war no one had asked for, or given out, receipts!

That afternoon, the 804th Engineers began salvage operations at Wheeler Field. The 3rd Engineers moved with the 24th Division to the north shore to defend against the expected Japanese invasion, which never came.

As eventful as 7 December 1941 was, it was but the first of many days of war for the engineers in Hawaii. Honolulu District completed the ferry route in January 1942, and built more airfields, and port and base facilities for the war.

All the Hawaiian Department engineer units served in the war. The 34th Engineers served in the Central Pacific and landed on Kwajalein. The 804th Engineers, also in the Central Pacific, saw action at Saipan. The 3rd and 64th Engineers went to the Southwest Pacific and fought and built their way through the Solomons, New Guinea, and the Philippines.



The 804th Aviation Engineer Battalion cleaned up the aftermath of wreckage caused by Japanese bombing of Wheeler Field on 7 December.