

A Date That Will Live in Infamy - Winter 1941

Where were you and what were you doing on December 7, 1941?

As everyone knows, that was the day the Japanese Imperial Government attacked Pearl Harbor on the Hawaiian Island of Oahu.

It was Sunday afternoon. After lunch about two o'clock, I decided to walk to the center of Avon. The Avon Drugstore was displaying Christmas gifts for sale with a special discount, and I was anxious to see them. If you purchased certain items during the fall, you were given special discount play money, much like the paper money used in the game monopoly. You could use the different colored paper money for a discount. For instance, an eight dollar watch could cost you six dollars in cash and two dollars in discount "funny money" if you wished.

I sat on a stool at the soda fountain while Bill Gordon and his wife decorated the huge display windows on each side of the entrance. Rocky, the pharmacist, was busy in the back of the store making up a prescription. The radio on the shelf over the cigarette counter carried the broadcast of the Giants football game. Rocky was an avid fan of any New York team, and the Yankees were his favorite team.

After finishing the prescription for old George Smith, who sat waiting in one of the booths at the far end of the store, Rocky came to the soda fountain. Smitty, the house painter, was always getting a prescription filled, it seemed.

"What'll you have, Billy," asked Rocky.

"A small cherry coke."

The radio blared away. The Giants were winning the football game. Suddenly the game was interrupted. Bob Trout of CBS radio said, "We interrupt this broadcast to bring you a special bulletin. The Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor. At 7:55 a.m., Hawaiian time, Japanese airplanes bombed...."

On and on went the special news broadcast. What did this mean? Would the United States go to war? I asked myself these questions. I had just turned 12 years old the week before, and I guess I was too young to realize the gravity of it all.

Bill Gordon and his wife gasped because they had a son Tom who was old enough to be drafted. Rocky said that he would try to join the army, although he was already turned down by the peacetime draft board because of a health problem. Old George Smith was just that – too old for the army.

When the German army attacked Poland to start World War II in 1939, the war seemed too remote for us to worry about. After all, we were neutral. But this?

The following day President Roosevelt asked Congress for a declaration of war, calling December 7, 1941, "a date that will live in infamy."

We heard the broadcast on the radio at home late in the afternoon when Roosevelt spoke those famous words. We didn't know the meaning of the word "infamy" so I looked up the word in the dictionary.

The next four years would remind us daily what "infamy" meant as our brothers, sisters and uncles went off to war.