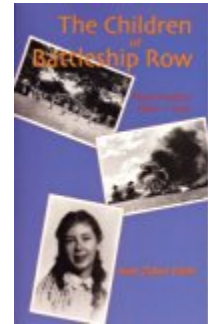


Joan Zuber Earle. *The Children of Battleship Row: Pearl Harbor 1940-1941*. Oakland: RDR Books, 2002. iii + 137 pp. \$16.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-57143-095-3.

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## Children's Views of the Pearl Harbor Attack, December 7, 1941

This volume is a first hand account of the Japanese attack on the U.S. Pacific Fleet, moored at Pearl Harbor, as seen through the eyes of a nine-year old girl who writes as an adult nearly sixty years after that event.[1] The narrative has a prologue, thirteen chapters, and appendix with four brief accounts by military personnel who were there, an epilogue, and a post script. The book is accompanied by thirty-one photographs; some are stock military photos (American and Japanese), but most are family photographs.

In October of 1940, eight-year old Joan Zuber and her older sister, Peggy (age nine), traveled with their parents via the Matson liner *Lurline* to a new duty station in Hawaii. Their new home in Quarters T was on Ford Island in the middle of Pearl Harbor Loch, located near "Battleship Row." The girl's father, Major Adolf Zuber USMC, was Commanding Officer of the Marine barracks, and Alice, the mother, was a homemaker. A child's recollection of home and school life on Ford Island during pre-war 1941 is finely tuned by adult descriptions of everyday events, ranging from the family's pet cats, curricular and non-curricular activities at the Kenneth Whiting School, the Lei Day celebration, and reading Nancy Drew books, to the family's Japanese American maid, Yuki.

By chapter 7, December 5, 1941, the reader has a perceptive view of military and civilian life before the attack. There are candid descriptions of the actual attack, including bombs falling and planes strafing, as well as evacuation to a shelter at Admiral Bellinger's house, sailors covered in fuel oil, a dead Japanese pilot, and the fate

of the battleships *West Virginia*, *Tennessee*, and *Arizona*. Joan Earle Zuber writes about the evening of December 7: "We walked home, not talking, going home towards the flames. Turning towards the harbor, we saw the new view from Quarters T. The battleships were broken. They lay like shattered toys on a sea of burning oil. I recognized the burning ship now. It was the *Arizona*, her tattered flag still flying on a rope by her stern, her broken mast bowed as if in prayer. Flames surrounded her" (p. 73). She further describes how children learned to load cartridges into machine gun belts in anticipation of a possible invasion, wartime conditions on Ford Island, the fear of delayed action bombs, as well as the girls' concern about their father and the strength displayed by their mother. Blackouts and a trip to Honolulu are recounted as the girls and their mother are among the civilian dependents and other evacuees being sent to the mainland on the *Lurline*. Major Zuber remained in Hawaii.

There are numerous fictional and non-fictional accounts of children's perspectives on the attack. A majority of these narratives end with the evening of December 7, 1941 or with evacuees sailing to ports in the United States. Joan Zuber Earle's account continues and provides a fresh look at the early war years through June 5, 1943. The trip to San Francisco, with overcrowding and seasickness, are detailed, as are issues such as the hunt for a small apartment, the children feeling out of place as new enrollees at the Redding school, concerns about air raid drills, the fate of a Japanese American girl at the school (who was subsequently sent to a relocation camp), finding a new apartment, and the importance of letters

from their father. Discovering the public library, changes in reading habits (no Nancy Drew books any longer—the girls had become young adults) and the effect of the motion picture “Bambi” on children are recounted. Sister Peggy’s bout with rheumatic fever, the joy of having a mixed breed toy collie, the family Victory Garden, and father’s return are also detailed.

While there are children’s accounts of domestic and school life during the early years of the Second World War in the United States, this narration is unique because the author gauged what she and her family saw as a “new arrival” to America and from the viewpoint of someone accustomed to life in Hawaii. Many of the non-fiction accounts are written by adults who were children in 1941 and by recounting these events, they seek to pass along to their children, grandchildren, and future generations their personal perceptions. Likewise, recounting this traumatic period is a catharsis, relieving tensions and anxieties that accompanied these authors into their adult lives.

In addition, there is juvenile literature (much of which is not written by juveniles) that serves as propaganda. Notable, and earliest, among these fictional narratives is R. Sidney Bowen’s *Red Randall at Pearl Harbor* (1944), a boy’s adventure wherein the son of an Army Air Force Colonel encounters a Japanese secret agent, Kato Harada. Barry Denenberg’s fictive diary of Amber Bellows (*Early Sunday Morning: The Pearl Harbor Diary of Amber Bellows, Hawaii 1941*, 2001) and Harry Mazer’s *A Boy at War: A Novel of Pearl Harbor* (2002) are more recent contributions to this literature. The latter concerns a boy’s fears and search for answers about the attack, while Kathleen Duey’s novel, *Janey G. Blue, Pearl Harbor, 1941* (2001), deals with a young girl’s fear and courage.

There are some three dozen volumes in juvenile literature written by adults for this audience or, less common as in the case of Zuber’s account, written by adults who experienced these events when they were children. Among these first-hand accounts is Ed Sheehan’s *One Sunday Morning* (1971), a personal narrative written when the author was twenty-three years old.

Military historian Tom Allen wrote a compelling narrative (*Remember Pearl Harbor: American and Japanese Survivors Tell Their Stories*, 2001) with first-person accounts taken from both American and Japanese survivors and creates a vivid portrait of what it was like to have witnessed, participated in, and lived through the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. The book provides readers with valuable insights into both the Japanese and American perspectives and demonstrates why people on both sides feel the need to remember Pearl Harbor. Theodore Taylor’s well researched account (*Air Raid—Pearl Harbor! The Story of December 7, 1941* [1971]) examines both sides of the conflict, taking a close look at the events leading up to it and providing compelling insight into the motives and actions of the brave men and women swept up in battle. Several authors such as G. C. Skipper (*Pearl Harbor* [1983]) and Shelley Tanaka (*Attack on Pearl Harbor: The True Story of the Day America Entered World War II* [2001]) sought the assistance of historical consultants (Robert Messer and John Lundstrom, respectively) and have prepared accurate accounts as well.

#### Note

[1]. Disclaimer: The opinions expressed herein are those of the reviewer and not of his employer or any other federal agency.

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