

Last chance to save Pearl Harbor
The Radar Unit at Opana
The warning fell on deaf ears

Source:

Pearl Harbor's WWII Collector's Edition
The Official 50th Anniversary Magazine-1991

On Sunday, December 7th, 1941, **Private Joseph L. Lockard** was the right man in the right place at exactly the right time. At 7:02 A.M., at the Army's Opana radar station near Kahuku Point on the northern tip of Oahu, this trained operator, using equipment specifically installed as an early warning system, observed the approach of the Japanese planes that would attack Pearl Harbor one hour later.

The radar unit at Opana worked precisely. As instructed, **Pvt. Lockard** sounded the alarm. The stark fact is that the warning of this modern-day "Paul Revere" fell on deaf ears.

Here, in a recent interview conducted by writer and editor **Blaine Taylor**, **Joseph Lockard** tells why.

LOCKARD

I was born in Williamsport, Pennsylvania in 1922. My father was an automobile mechanic. I grew up in the west end of Williamsport, in an area called Newberry, where I attended public schools.

There was a group of guys who hung around the gas station and one of them had an older brother who'd just come back from a hitch in the Army in the Philippines, and of course he fired us all up with the stories about the exotic places he'd been and the things he'd seen. He was living like a prince over there, which you could do in the pre-World War II days on that kind of an income. He even had a houseboy! I wasn't quite 18 yet, but quit high school in order to enlist in the Army. My parents were quite upset, especially because I was going into my senior year, but later I got my GED diploma. So, we all went down and joined. We were all bored to tears

anyway. I really don't know why we chose the Army as opposed to anything else. There was really no reason, but we were guaranteed service in the islands.

TAYLOR

In August, 1940, Japan was at war only in China, but the Germans had overrun France and Western Europe.

LOCKARD

Yes, but all of that was remote from Williamsport

TAYLOR

Did you feel that the United States was going to be in a war?

LOCKARD

It wasn't really a consideration. We knew there was a war going on in Europe, but we really didn't give it much thought.

TAYLOR

Where did you go for your training?

LOCKARD

We went to Harrisburg to be sworn in and from there to Ft. Slocum, off New Rochelle, New York....that was the port of embarkation from the East Coast at that time....and from there we went on to Ft. Wadsworth on Staten Island, right across from Ft. Pendleton, which was where the Verrazzano Bridge is now. This was the prewar Army, understand, and there was a total of 185,000 officers and men in the service at that time. They were starting to build up because people in Washington were anticipating future trouble.

There was no basic training yet. We did what other GIs at that time did in casual companies...whatever jobs that no one else wanted to do. We tested mines for New York Harbor, since they were beginning to lay mines there. They had 55 gallon drums with circular suction cups welded on each end. On one end there was a chain that went down to an anchor and on the other end there was a large hole for the fuse mechanism. We were testing these big drums in a small swimming pool to see how they worked. We also spent a lot of time going on the Staten Island Ferry over to see New York,

but how great of a time could you have on Army pay? At that time, it was \$21.00 a month!

In November, 1940, we got on an Army transport, a converted merchant ship, and went down through the Panama Canal, then up the west Coast to Fort McDowell in San Francisco. From there we headed out across the Pacific, and arrived in Hawaii in either late November or early December 1940.

TAYLOR

So you were there over a year before the Japanese attack.

LOCKARD

Yes, we docked near Honolulu and got on the little railway, with its narrow gauge, and we were hauled up to Schofield Barracks. It was all open country and the main post was some miles away. That's where we were located and got our basic training, which lasted about six weeks. Right after that we began our radio equipment training.

TAYLOR

How did you get into the Signal Corps? Did you ask for that?

LOCKARD

When we were on the ship, they came around and recruited our company and it sounded like a good deal....an opportunity. In those days, you could be in the Army for two or three hitches before you even made corporal! We thought opportunity might be better in this new company....aircraft warning, whatever that was.... so I volunteered.

We didn't have any equipment yet....it hadn't even been sent to the islands... and we didn't have any information on the equipment that was coming, so, to fill in, we learned radio. We had classes in its theory, also in Morse code, and trained in field operations in communications. I still have my radio physics textbook. We were all privates, with a cadre' of non-coms from the infantry to form this unit. There were no specific assignments at that point; we were all trained in everything.

In August, 1941, our equipment arrived and we started to learn about it. There were six units of 270Bs. It took two men to operate one unit.

TAYLOR

In the movie Tora! Tora! Tora!, they show the unit up on a hillside looking out to the sea. There are two young kids dropped off by a sergeant, who drives off. As he leaves, they ask him, "What do we do if we see something?" He says, "Call in." They protest, "But we don't have a telephone!" He says, "There's one down the road."

LOCKARD

That's a lot of hogwash!!!

TAYLOR

What actually did happen?

LOCKARD

The first unit I was at was on Koko Head, where I was from September to November, 1941. It wasn't until Thanksgiving Day that there was a station on Opana, which is where I was on the day of the attack. The Opana site, where the radar sat, was about 530 feet above sea level. There were no living facilities up there at all. We were living in pyramidal tents on the beach down below....a good five miles away. The truck would drive up the paved road, turn off away from the sea and drive up a dirt road another two miles until it reached the radar site.

TAYLOR

Were there guards at night?

LOCKARD

No. The units were locked up at night, but I don't think anyone was worried about sabotage. There were six sites around the island of Oahu in all... Kaena, Opana, Ft. Shafter, Koko Head, Haleiwa and Waianae.

TAYLOR

December 7, 1941.....What Happened?

LOCKARD

I was up there with **George Elliott**. Originally he was from Chicago, and lives now, I believe, in New Jersey. We'd gone up there the night before....Saturday...and stayed overnight in a pup tent. This was because our exercise was going to start at 4 A.M.

TAYLOR

Could you see the ocean from where you were? Could you see Pearl Harbor?

LOCKARD

Yes, You looked right out over a bay. No, there was a mountain ridge between us the harbor. We were at the north end....almost at the northern tip of the island. Our alarm clock went off a little before 4 A.M. and we set up the radar.

TAYLOR

Was there a temptation to say "the heck with it" and just sleep in?

LOCKARD

We had to report by telephone. That telephone line went directly to the information center at Fort Shafter. Each one of these sets was connected to a telephone operator there, and they had a plotting board. The operator relayed the information to a plotter, who put it on the board.

So we opened up the equipment and turned it on. This was mobile equipment with three vans....a motor generator van...and in that was a diesel generator unit, and electrifier. This is a 270B I'm talking about, that was connected by cable to the operating van. In that van, we had a pier, a plotting table, a transmitter, a receiver, an oscilloscope with all the necessary controls, and a water cooler for the transmitting tubes. And that was connected to the antenna truck, which had copper tubing sections that ran from the transmitter out underneath the antenna truck. The latter had a metal rig on it that could be laid flat; it was cranked up into place. Before we did that, we mounted all the basy and bolted them to the antenna, and then

cranked it up.

It went about 45 feet up in the air. We had to point the antenna at the North Star...just like the old wagon trains...otherwise, you wouldn't know where the azimuth was, so we had to do it at night.

It took two men to operate it because one had to do the plotting and the communication, while the other worked the scope with all its knobs. Our operation period was from 4 to 7 A.M. At 7, everyone in the operation network was going to close down because it was Sunday and the end of the program. If it had been a weekday, we'd have been there all day.

TAYLOR

So, if the Japanese had come after 7 A.M., you wouldn't have seen them?

LOCKARD

They did come after 7 A.M.! We saw them at 7:02, when we should have been shut down. The reason we weren't was because the truck hadn't come up to take us down. **Elliott** had only been with us a couple of weeks and needed the training, so, since the truck hadn't arrived, why not? The Air Corps normally had a dawn flight, so I figured there'd be something to look at on our screens, something to track. You have to remember that, in those days, planes weren't flying all around the Hawaiian Islands like mosquitoes....there usually wasn't much to look at. Most of the time, you didn't see anything.

At 7:02, **Elliott** had just say down at the screen and said, "What's this?" I said, "Well, let me see." There was this thing on the screen. It was the largest blip I'd ever seen!

At first, we thought something was wrong with the equipment, so we ran through a series of tests. I checked out the receiver and the transmitter to see if there was anything mechanically wrong. There was nothing electronically wrong that we could see, so we started plotting the blip. We did that for a while, then decided we'd call to see if there was anybody down there on the phone.

The only person down at the information booth was the telephone

exchange operator. We raised him...a guy by the name of **Joe McDonald**. He was another private I'd known ever since Fort Wadsworth. He said, "I'll look around and see if I can find anybody," But everybody had left for breakfast. By now, it was about 7:10.

When we first picked up the "blip", there were about 155 miles away, I believe. I'm not sure of these numbers anymore, but I know they were directly north of us. There was no way of calculating speed, but they were coming from the north, not the direction of the United States, which was to the east of us.

By now **McDonald** had found an **Air Corps officer, Lt. Kermit Tyler**. He came back and said, "It's okay, it's okay." They were expecting a flight of B-17s from the States, but if the B-17s were that far off course, they'd never make it.

We continued to track it, and called them back again. This time, we got **Lt. Tyler** on the phone with us. He still said, "Don't worry about it."

We tracked it within 20-some miles of the island and the reason we stopped then was that we lost it on the screen because of the mountain range behind us. The reflection wiped out the signal as they got closer to us. We couldn't see them with the naked eye because they'd swung out over the harbor.

TAYLOR

Could you hear the bombing?

LOCKARD

No, but we could see the plumes of black smoke coming out of the direction of Pearl Harbor. We didn't see it right then. The truck came sometime after 7:30 and we closed up the equipment. Part way down to the base, another truck passed us with everybody aboard yelling and waving their hands and the truck's horn blowing like hell. We knew something was wrong, but we didn't know what. We continued to go on down, we began to see smoke, and when we reached the camp, we were told. But we still couldn't hear any of the explosions because of the mountain range. As soon as we were told what happened, we knew right away that it was what **Elliott** and I

had seen.

INSERTS

"Don't Worry About It..."

After "the largest blip I've ever seen," appeared on **Pvt. Lockard's** radar screen, he telephoned for instructions from the Information Center at Ft. Shafter, which was located about 30 miles south of the Opana Station and several miles east of Pearl Harbor.

Lt. Kermit Tyler, the only officer on charge at the Center, informed **Lockard**, "Don't worry about it..."

Tyler was the pursuit officer at the Center. His duties were "to assist the Controller in ordering planes to intercept enemy planes or supposed enemy planes." He had been pursuit officer for only four days. On the morning of December 7, he was awaiting the arrival of several B-17s from the States. When he heard of **Pvt. Lockard's** sighting, he believed the Flying Fortresses had finally arrived.

In his 1981 treatise, *At Dawn we Slept: The Untold Story of Pearl Harbor*, the late **Gordon W. Prange** observed,..."**Lockard** made on big mistake: He did not tell **Tyler** that the sighting contained more than 50 planes. If he had, **Tyler** could scarcely have mistaken it for a flight of B-17s. Such a number would represent a good slice of the entire American inventory of the type of bomber. Technically speaking, **Tyler** erred in not telephoning **Major Kenneth P. Berquist**, operations officer on the 17th Pursuit Wing, but from the practical standpoint, it made little real difference.

The "Paul Revere" of Pearl Harbor

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, **Joseph L. Lockard**, the man who tried to warn of the approach of Japanese planes, remained at the Opana installation. "We were operating around the clock," he recalls.

In March 1942, he was returned to the States and enrolled in officer candidate school, from which he graduated as Second Lieutenant.

After additional training in radar, he served in Alaska and the Aleutian Islands, where he was promoted to first lieutenant.

"I'd gotten married when I came back from Hawaii to go to O.C.S., and today my wife Pauline and I have three grown children."

"Following the war, I worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad for a year, starting out as a trackman and ending as a track supervisor. Next I went to Sylvania Electric as a draftsman, then became a designer of electromagnetrons for radar and later a technical writer and supervisor of design."

"In 1965 I went with Amp, Inc. in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. They're the world's largest manufacturer of electrical connectors. I stayed with them until I retired in 1986, going from a designer to a principal project manager with over 40 patents...including the little frequency switch in garage door openers."

Lockard sees his role in the drama of Pearl Harbor as "one of the footnotes to history." As he told a reporter in 1988, "You can play all sorts of "what-if" games. The real value of the whole thing, I've always felt, was to give credibility to the equipment. Everybody finally recognized the potential, where before, some didn't."

More Information found on the Internet

A great website sent in by Veteran Charles Lewis

PEARL HARBOR REMEMBERED

<http://www.execpc.com/~dschaaf/mainmenu.html>

PEARL HARBOR SURVIVORS ASSOCIATION

<http://members.aol.com/phsasecy97/index.html>

This is the Antenna mast of the SCR-279 Long-Range Aircraft Detection Radar Unit, which was operating at the Opana Station on the northern tip of Oahu Island, Hawaii, at 7:02 A.M. on the morning of Dec. 7th, 1941. The unit was made in Feb. 1940 at the Westinghouse Radio Division at Baltimore under contract to the U.S. Army Signal Corps. A Total of 108 fixed and mobil sets were delivered prior to the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor.

In 1988, writer Blaine Taylor, left, interviews Joseph L. Lockard who is one of the two U.S. Army Signal Corps radar operators who picked up the large blip that turned out to be a raid of Japanese carrier-based aircraft 132 miles away, headed for Pearl Harbor



Pictures taken by Tim R. Cook of WV. from the Museum of the
SCR-270 Unit similar to one used in Hawaii in 1941

Return to Pearl Harbor Index

Contributed by Bernard "Ben" McMurray



[SLC MAIN INDEX](#) [SLC MAIN ROSTER](#) [WEBSITE UPDATES](#) [ARTICLE INDEX](#)
[LG. GROUPS](#) [MISC. PICTURES](#) [SHIP PICTURES](#) [SCOUT PLANES](#) [HELPFUL](#)
[INFORMATION](#)
[VETERAN'S STORIES](#) [SHIP'S STORE](#) [SLC ASSOCIATION](#) [OFFICIAL DECKLOGS](#)
[SLC HISTORIAN](#)

"To the Top"

The address to this page is deafears.htm

Source:

WWII Collector's Edition of the Pearl Harbor Magazine's

Official 50th Anniversary Magazine, 1991, written by Blaine Taylor

Dec. 13th, 2001 Permission to print from:

Starlog Telecommunications, Inc., 475 Park Avenue South, New York, NY. 10016

Inside magazine states: Text by Blaine Taylor

Blaine Taylor was a pictorial consultant on the Time-Life Book series "The Third Reich". His articles on military subjects have appeared in Soldier of Fortune, Gung-Ho!, New Breed, Air Classics, Sea Classics, Military, Vietnam: Chronicles of War, Military History, World War II, Vietnam, America's Civil War and Great Battles, among others. He gained first-hand knowledge of military operations serving at the U.S. Army's 25th Infantry division's Jungle and Guerilla Warfare Training Center in Hawaii and later with the 199th Light Infantry Brigade in Vietnam.