

Hawaii Goes to War: The Aftermath of Pearl Harbor

Carroll Robbins Jones

Wilbur D. Jones Jr.

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“There was an oddly eerie quietness about all movement and conversation, almost as if this was a surreal dream.” This quotation, from author Carroll Jones, aptly summarizes the tone of this autobiographical history of the days, months, and years immediately following the devastation of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Although in this instance, she is describing her boat trip back to the mainland, with her brother and her mother, Patricia O’Meara Robbins, it also describes what the silence must have been like after that great roaring attack.

Jones and her husband, Wilbur Jones, Jr., have compiled personal accounts from Navy personnel and Navy wives, Jones’s personal remembrances of her childhood in Oahu, relevant newspaper articles, and photographs by Robbins, who was an AP photographer at the time. Her moving and sometimes disturbing images show the attack and its aftermath from a ground-zero perspective.

The book is loaded with technical information to supplement the personal accounts, such as the types of planes that attacked, which ships were struck, and the specific damage that the ships suffered.

The chapter titled “Destroyed to Pieces: Ship Salvage Operations” details how some of the damaged ships were repaired and eventually reentered into service. A question that the casual student of Pearl Harbor might not have considered is the human casualties that occurred below decks during the attack. This chapter describes the recovering of those bodies, as well as the technical aspects of salvaging these ships; often it was dangerous work, and several men lost their lives during the salvage.

The most essential element of this collection is Robbins’s photos. One of the most moving images is that of a charred corpse lying next to a vehicle: some unfortunate soul who was found by a stray bomb. Many images deal with the harsh realities of the attack, even its most gruesome details. The photos, however, of the author and her brother happily playing amid the bombed wreckage of a nearby home make the entire ordeal appear surreal indeed.

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