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"Freedom of the Press belongs to those who own one."

A. J. Liebling of the New Yorker

May 23, 2001



Commentary

Taking the Point Position...

The movie Pearl Harbor opened in Hawaii on Monday.

Hawaii is a natural place to open this movie because it is the home of Pearl Harbor, but it is still causing more than a little strain. Certainly no one can question the loyalty of the Nisei who lived in Hawaii, but there are a LOT of people in Hawaii these days who were Japanese citizens and loyal supporters of the Emperor during the war.

It is normal in the Islands to dance a bit around this problem. VJ (Victory over Japan) Day is not referred to in public - it is called "Victory in the Pacific." Even the U.S. Navy goes along with this charade. When broadcasting from a Navy ship on VJ Day last year, a local talk show host was asked by the Navy to refer to the day as "Victory in the Pacific." About half-way through the program he finally called the day VJ Day, to the obvious joy of the Navy crew.

Last week the same talk show host was discussing the Pearl Harbor movie opening this year, and how the sensibilities of the Japanese may be ruffled. He said of the VJ Day charade, "it was VJ Day! My name is Rick Hamada. Hamada! That name ain't Scottish!"

Local newspaper reports indicate that the movie will be played in Japan as a love story. Movie trailers and posters designed for Japanese audiences are playing down the war story. I haven't seen the movie, but it should all be about the war.

I have recently re-visited the Arizona Memorial and it is interesting to note the number of Japanese citizens on the tour. They are uniformly serious and respectful, but who



knows what they are thinking. I read in the newspapers that discuss such things that the Japanese express their sorrow and concern after the tour.

The "Go for Broke" Nisei heroes, an entirely Japanese-American organization, was the most decorated unit in the U.S. Army in Europe. Much of their recognition was late in coming, and they deserve even more recognition than they got. They saved the Lost Battalion from Texas by themselves when every other battalion withdrew under withering fire, as I recall my history. I know they are absolutely revered in Texas.

Here on the Islands there was great suspicion that the accuracy of the bombing on December 7, 1941 was the result of Japanese-Americans providing intelligence and planning sabotage. Nothing could have been further from the truth. The Japanese government was unable to use these American citizens. Although California held most Japanese-Americans in camps, thanks to Earl Warren, a liberal who was to then further distinguish himself on the U.S. Supreme Court, Hawaiians were not imprisoned except for a very few who were sent to California.

One of the reasons the Hawaiian Japanese were not imprisoned was that a Hawaiian policeman who was asked by the FBI to give a report assured the FBI, correctly, that there was no risk. After the War, that policeman was instrumental in forming a strong Democratic Party with the returning Nisei heroes, and that party overthrew the oligarchy of Republicans who had ruled since Statehood. The Democrats have subsequently formed an Asian (primarily Japanese) oligarchy that has ruled continuously for almost 60 years. As a result of overly generous support for unions in general, and teachers in particular, that Democrat oligarchy is teetering.

The largest single group of tourists in Hawaii, annually, is Japanese tourists. These are not Nisei who fought so hard for us – many tourists fought hard against us, and Japanese history books give very short shrift to the attack on Pearl Harbor.

With all the hoopla involving the movie Pearl Harbor, it will be interesting to see the various reactions to the film and to the hoopla surrounding the film. We certainly do not have to sugarcoat it for the Japanese-Americans who lived here and fought so well for their new country.

And we should not sugarcoat it for those who attacked us.

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A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, con a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects.

Robert Heinlein

