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U.S. SENDING SCORES OF PILOTS TO HAWAII AND PHILIPPINES

The latest transfer orders published by the War Department show that some 118 second lieutenants who have recently won their wings have been ordered to embark for the Pacific outposts in the next three weeks.

That necessity has in turn raised the problems of how to give young pilots actual army flying experience in high-speed, complex combat ships once they have completed their work with the slower trainers.

Until a pilot has had about a year of such experience he is not considered ready to engage in combat operations.

Excerpt from the *Washington Post*, June 5, 1941

Dan Lukens's leather-gloved hand rammed the throttle. The force of the screaming Allison V-12 engine shoved his body into the back of his seat. As the rumble from a half dozen fighters grew louder, Dan blinked sweat from his eyes. The metallic black "birds" came into view, distorting the air behind them into a fuzzy haze.

Grimacing, Dan shoved the stick full forward and rudder pedals full right and cranked his Curtiss P-40 into the Chennault maneuver. His nimble fighter spun into an outside barrel roll, jerking his body against his harness. He pulled out of the roll and converted his diving momentum to a high-speed climb, mentally preparing for the dogfight ahead.

"Come on, boys. Show me what you've got," Dan hissed through clenched teeth, his neck tensed and senses peaking.

But the attackers held back. They circled Dan's group cautiously. Finally, when minutes passed and they didn't strike, Dan took the initiative.

He broke left through a wispy cloud and targeted the lead plane. "You're mine now!" he yelled over the roaring engine. He pinpointed the enemy plane through his sights—a clear shot. He squeezed the trigger. "Got ya!" he yelled with excitement into his radio. "You're out of here, pal. Yes, I'm talking to you." When the plane fell away, he turned his attention to Gabriel Lincoln's plane—now being trailed by one of the attackers. Gabe attempted to shake him, to no avail.

"Keep it up, Gabe. Don't let him get you. I'm on my way."

Dan dropped into the sights of Gabe's attacker, hoping to draw his attention. The attacker pulled off Gabe, making a yard-wide turn and leaving a trail of exhaust behind him.

In their pilots' training, Dan's instructor had told him never to follow a Japanese Zero into a tight turn. Yet with adrenaline pumping, he turned after the plane in tigerish pursuit.

Dan pulled against his harness as if trying to urge every bit of power from the P-40. "That's the way, doll face. You've got it." He dove straight into the attacker's flight path, cutting him off. The attacker had no choice but to accelerate and pop up into Dan's line of vision, or slam into his plane. Dan was betting his life on the first option.

"Pull up. Come on." A loud roaring sound from beneath him drowned out his words.

Seconds seemed like hours as the long nose of Dan's P-40 blocked his view of the other fighter, but he held his position, worrying for the briefest instant whether he'd overdone it, cut the guy off too short.

Suddenly, the attacker increased his speed and altitude, popping into view not more than fifty yards in front of Dan. The pilot's sweaty, glaring face turned Dan's direction.

Dan grinned, spotting the plane in his sights. "Got ya!" he called into his radio, then waved to the pilot.

Dan noted his kill. The attacker dropped toward the ground, and though the temptation was strong to

visually follow the plane's path to the harbor, Dan had better sense. Especially with other attackers around.

After picking off the rest of the "enemy" fighters, Dan headed back to once again claim the day's most kills. His heart still thumped as the harbor came into view, sparkling in the morning sunlight.

As long as I've got this plane, I can tackle anything thrown at me. He sucked in a calming breath as the Curtiss P-40 broke through thin clouds into the blue. A surge of confidence as strong as the plane's engine welled in his chest. Confidence in his flying and in his team. While others fretted that war was inevitable, Dan trusted that the U.S. Army Air Corps would hold its own . . . trusted that his leaders knew what they were doing.

As the P-40 continued its descent, Pearl Harbor greeted him, its blue waters spreading out in the shape of a cloverleaf—the stalk being the entrance to the channel and the leaves unfolding to the west, middle, east, and southeast lochs.

A four-leaf clover. Dan felt like the luckiest guy alive to be playing war games with fast planes in such a beautiful place. It reminded him of the toy battles he and his friends used to play in the sandlot at the end of the street. Only these weren't model planes, but rather the army's best, that he and his buddies maneuvered around the sky.

Between the east and southeast lochs, Ford Island bustled with activity. It was a compact airfield complete with tower and hangars, administrative buildings, and

living quarters. The movement of people and machines on the island stirred in full gear.

Alongside the island, docked in the harbor, sat a fleet of battleships moored in pairs. Dan took note of their bows pointed toward the southwest channel. Intermingled among them, civilian ships dropped off tourist groups to be entertained on Waikiki Beach, lovingly referred to as the “Coney Island of the Pacific.”

Dan had taken off from Ford Island numerous times, but today his maneuvers originated from another nearby air base, Hickam Field—due south of Ford Island and the Navy Yard—on the island of Oahu itself.

Within a matter of minutes, he had executed his landing at Hickam and parked his plane wingtip to wingtip next to the others. He joined the other pilots in leather flight jackets, who now formed a dozen-man circle on the tarmac. Dan slid off his flight helmet as he approached the group and ran his hand through his sweat-drenched blond hair. Perspiration had made a wet stain on his flight suit, ringing his underarms and making a dark spot on his chest.

A cheer rose from two or three of the guys as he approached. Others called out “Just lucky!” and “I’ll get you next time!”

“I’m just glad you’re on our side.” His buddy Zeke Olson gave him a strong shoulder squeeze. “I guess that means you win the bet. I owe you a drink at the Black Cat.”

“Nah. How about a football game on the beach?”

I'm getting tired of all the commotion and noise in the honky-tonk district.”

“You're on. UCLA paired up against Oregon State once again—Hawaiian style.”

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The aroma of tropical flowers wafted through the cool morning air as Libby Connors, dressed in a flight suit, strode across the tarmac of John Rodgers Airport to do a quick check of the Piper Cub. The plane wasn't as fancy as those she'd flown in the States, but it was simple and economical. And this newer Cub benefited from a wider front seat, allowing teacher and student to sit side by side rather than tandem. She considered the Piper safe and sturdy—until the trade winds blew in.

But to Libby, the best type of plane was any one she could fly. That's why she'd come to Hawaii and why she had stayed. Distanced from mainland prejudices against women, she had found a place where she could soar.

Satisfied the plane was in top shape, she patted its sleek metal belly.

“Mr. Connors?” said a youthful voice from behind her.

Libby turned, her tall frame causing her to meet the sailor eye-to-eye. *They're looking younger all the time.* She stretched out her hand. “Miss Connors, actually. Good to have you. This your first flying lesson?”

The boy's eyes widened as he studied her face and the medium brown locks she'd tucked into her flight helmet.

“Better close that jaw before you swallow a fly, kid.” Libby took two long strides and pointed to the open door of the Cub. “The clock is ticking.”

The sailor didn’t budge. Libby glanced back.

“Uh, I didn’t know I was gettin’ lessons from a girl.” His hands and shoulders moved as he spoke, as if he shrugged off his words as well as spoke them.

Libby crossed her arms, straightened her shoulders, and waited.

His eyes darted back toward the office, as if hoping someone would emerge and tell him there’d been a misunderstanding. When no one came to his rescue, he dug his hands into his pockets and offered a slight shrug. “Uh, okay, I guess. You’re not gonna get me killed, are you?”

Been flying since you were still in elementary school learning how to read, Libby wanted to respond. Instead she reached over and patted the kid’s shoulder. “Got my adequate teaching licenses all in order. Besides, during this first lesson I doubt you’ll learn much anyway. Most guys are so excited by the sight of the island and ocean from the air that nothing sticks. So we’ll sign you up for a lesson next weekend too. Saturday, if possible. Sunday’s nearly always full.”

The kid nodded and climbed into the small cockpit. His face reddened as Libby slid in next to him, their shoulders and hips pressed together in the tight space.

He’ll get over that too. Libby quickly scanned the runway, checking for other planes before starting the engine. *Before long, he’ll just think of me as one of the guys. A buddy, a pal. And a darn good instructor.*

Sometimes, in the first waking heartbeat when dawn stirred Natsuo Hidki from his slumber, he believed he was there again. In the California town of modern living. In the country that could not comprehend the traditions of his homeland. At the college where friendships were made and soon abandoned.

It had been two years since he'd returned to Japan. His time at UCLA had been short. Why, then, did his mind keep taking him back? Perhaps as a curse. An aching reminder of his turning away from the Land of the Rising Sun.

Father had asked him to go. Believed that Western thinking and technology were important for the future of Japan. And though his mother dared not disagree, in the split second before she looked away Natsuo had seen fear in her gaze. She worried that her son would not come back. Just as his sister had not.

But Natsuo had returned. Smarter in the understanding of the world, and witnessing his homeland in a new light. Though still bound by his country's codes of honor, Natsuo's California teachers had succeeded in planting the sturdy oaks of Western thinking within the ancient soil of his soul.

America. Why couldn't it leave him alone?

As Natsuo lay on his mat and breathed in the scent of cherry blossoms through the open window, he wondered why he'd been transported back. It would be

better to forget. Especially now, with his upcoming position as a soldier.

Through the thin walls of his childhood home, his mother's humming caused the corners of Natsuo's lips to flicker a slight smile. She was preparing his favorite breakfast, rice and miso soup. His call to service weighed on her heart too.

He rose from his mat and stretched in the morning rays, then padded across the cool wooden floor while his mind granted permission for East and West to co-exist. Without hesitation, the words of the American poet Emily Dickinson joined his mother's tune:

*He ate and drank the precious Words—
His Spirit grew robust—
He knew no more that he was poor,
Nor that his frame was Dust—*

*He danced along the dingy Days
And this Bequest of Wings
Was but a Book – What Liberty
A loosened spirit brings—*

Natsuo had memorized the words long ago at UCLA, in a class his father had urged him not to take. How, after all, could American poetry ever make a difference to the future of Japan?

He only wished it would stop haunting his thoughts.