

Streets of Honolulu

Near the end of WWII, I stood in a telephone booth in San Francisco.

“Hello, Mama, it’s me.”

“Versil, is that you? Aubrey?”

“No, Mama, this is John. We’re shipping-out today. I’m going overseas.”

Mama hesitated and her voice broke as I held the receiver closer to my ear.

“Your brother, Versil, said he would call me today, too; and I just got a letter from Aubrey. He’s stationed in Hawaii. Maybe, you’ll see him.” Mama just didn’t know that could never happen because I was on my way directly to the Far East.

I mostly repeated, “Okay, Mama.” And the three minutes call was over. I hadn’t even told her that I loved her.

We sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge, and for a few days the ship tumbled and rolled in stormy seas

Then, a day came with calm waters. But a loud boom from below the water level shook the ship. Whistles blew, bells sounded, and the speakers shouted, “Buckle life jackets and report to assigned ‘life boat’ positions. We’ve hit a loose Jap mine.”

News spread that a boiler had been knocked-out, and we’d leave the convoy and return to Pearl Harbor.

A few days later, we pulled into a repair slip at Pearl Naval Yards. “Everybody will pack gear and stand-by to debark. Army Barracks are overcrowded; so, until the ship is repaired, any troops with family in Hawaii report to the officer in charge of your section.”

I stood in front of the Lieutenant, “Yes, Sir, my brother’s here.” The officer seemed to think every guy ahead of me was concocting a tall tale in order to be free to roam while the ship was being repaired. “Oh, I know he’s here but no Sir, I don’t have an exact address.”

I must have looked sincere or innocent because he handed me a pass and a contact telephone number to check back with him every week. I took my small backpack, stored

my big duffel bag, left the ship, caught a bus, and went looking for a Marine somewhere in Hawaii.

Soon, I passed through the main gate at Marine Headquarters. I was a Private in the Army; and unlike enlisted Marines, we had little round metal buttons on the collar of our dress shirts – one had ‘U.S.’ and the other had cross rifles signifying Infantry. Our caps had a rope-like blue ribbon sewed on the top edge. Later, I realized that I was mistaken for an officer, being the cause for the salutes and standing at attention shown me. I gave my brother’s name and hardly anything else to a file clerk. An hour or so later, he told me the whereabouts of Aubrey.

I caught a bus, rode a ferry, and a second bus before arriving at the base where my brother was stationed. I received more salutes while getting directions to his barracks. After the shock of seeing me, we hugged and laughed as I explained how I came to be there.

His First Sergeant prepared leave papers and sent us in front of a frowning Company Commander. He made a telephone call and then released Aubrey on leave.

We went downtown Honolulu and got a room in the YMCA. For days we walked dang near every street in that town. (Army pay didn’t allow many taxi rides) I remember that we went to a lot of picture shows, too.

The sweetest smells in this world were the flowers for sale on the streets, and some of the dearest memories of my brother were in Hawaii. He patted my back and hugged my neck every day. It seemed he told me that he loved me about a hundred times.

After twenty-seven days, the ship was repaired, and I sailed for the Far East.

That was over 60 years ago, but I know that someday I’ll see my brother again and we’ll smell flowers and walk on streets of gold. And I’ll hug him.