Japanese attacks ended family's peaceful life in Philippines

By Bill Decker
Staff Writer

For Kay Drouant, the nightmare that began with Pearl Harbor nearly ended with the execution of her family.

But Drouant, a Lafayette resident who spent three years in Japan, remembers little of the terror that nearly ended with the execution of a family, that began with Pearl Harbor.

The Dec. 7 attack on U.S. soil was a surprise to few, but it was a shock to the Japanese who had left Pearl Harbor on Dec. 8 in east Asia because of the international date line - that point of Japanese strategy.

The guards returned, and the internment camp was surrounded by 55-gallon drums filled with water. And Guilfoil sent his family to the country outside Manila for a while to get them away from the bombing.

The Japanese attack routed Allied troops under Gen. Douglas MacArthur, who led his men to Bataan and Corregidor. MacArthur, pledging to return, left the Philippines in January to take command of Allied forces in Australia.

Food was supposed to be more plentiful outside the city, and at Los Banos families were allowed to raise their own food in 6-foot-by-10-foot plots. Guilfoil volunteered to plow fields at a nearby farm. He brought the plow home to work the family garden.

Drouant says her parents continued to shield her from the harsher realities, even when food grew scarce despite Guilfoil's efforts. The day's meals were eventually reduced to rice mush in the morning and cornmeal mush in the evening, sometimes supplemented by gravy.

By the time her father left the camp, she said, he weighed only 85 pounds. "I know he starved himself for his family," Drouant said.

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The Guilfoils went to an Army hospital, where Drouant was greeted by Mrs. Douglas MacArthur. Then the family was taken to the United States aboard a ship.

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Local survivors recall 'day of infamy'

By STEVE CULPEPPER

As a group, they're still called the survivors. Even after 50 years. They are the ones who witnessed, lived through and fought through — survived — what endures in many minds as the single most treacherous act in history, the Dec. 7, 1941, attack by Japanese warplanes on U.S. bases in Hawaii. And though history overflows with sneak attacks, Pearl Harbor is still what we have, what we use as the touchstone for what is calculating and murderous — what is infamous.

On that day when the country was yanked from its armchair, shaken and shoved into action, these men were on the front lines of this country's first battle in that bloodiest, most God-awful war in history. From any perspective, that much is certain.

They're old men now, or getting there. And recently a handful of local survivors looked back 50 years, into their youths, and remembered that day.

Carl Randall joined the Navy in 1938. He'd been stationed at Pearl Harbor for two years, on and off. His ship, the cruiser Detroit, was often at sea, scouting ahead of battleship convoys, returning to anchor at home port in Hawaii.

On that December morning, the Detroit was anchored off Ford Island in the center of Pearl Harbor. In a row of ships was the Detroit, the Raleigh, the Utah, and the Tangier, stern to bow. Around Ford Island — a rectangle of land sitting in the middle of the heavily armed harbor — were other ships. Even more ships filled the waters and the slips of the surrounding harbor.

It began a few minutes before 8 a.m. Two waves of torpedo planes and dive bombers, 350 in all. The log of the Detroit from that day reads: "Six planes attacked Detroit, Raleigh and Utah. ... Utah capsized five minutes after being hit. ... Raleigh began settling and listing to port. One torpedo passed about 25 yards ... between the Detroit and the Raleigh ... Began making preparations for getting under way."

Through all the confusion and frenzy, the 25-year-old Randall and many of his fellow sailors were "dogged in," sealed inside the Detroit. "All compartments are water-tight. Each is sealed off. We sat there for two hours. Bombs going off all around. Bombs going off. Like standing by a big piece of steel and having somebody hit it with a sledge hammer. Explosions going off all around you."

"We were pretty lucky," Randall said. "Lucky they didn't end up like sailors on the Utah."