

SERVICE-CIVILIAN TENSIONS IN HONOLULU

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The pains of social reconversion in Hawaii are less acute than mainland headlines of race riots between white servicemen and Island natives might suggest. Compared with most communities with large numbers of servicemen, Honolulu's experience of getting back to a peacetime equilibrium has been mild. August fourteenth, 1945, for example, was probably celebrated in as hilarious a fashion in Honolulu as in any other American city. Yet, Honolulu with its high proportion of servicemen and racially mixed civilian population, one-third of whom were of Japanese ancestry, had no incidents of rioting such as occurred in Pacific Coast cities. Neither has Honolulu experienced the zoot-suit riots of Southern California, although Hawaii has had many of the same elements to contend with.

The one episode of dramatic proportions took place on the evening of November 12, 1945 when an estimated five hundred sailors from the Honolulu Naval Air Station descended in force upon the neighboring civilian community of Damon Tract and for several hours gave expression to their repressed feelings by throwing rocks at the houses and shouting threats at the "gooks" who lived within. This single incident which created a sensation in the mainland press grew out of unfounded rumors that had been circulating for several days among the restless sailors at the air station. Their gesture of revenge for the supposed murder of two of their members by civilians was surprisingly temperate for a mob of five hundred enraged sailors. Windows and doors were smashed, automobiles and motorcycles were damaged, but no civilians were reported injured. That no more violent disorders on a mass scale occurred is perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of a potentially explosive situation. Every city situated near a large troop center in the autumn of 1945 was in danger of outbursts from the restless service personnel impatient to be sent home.

Honolulu's problem was further aggravated by its character as a port city and the presence of a large floating population both civil and military. From the earliest days of contact with the roistering men of the sea, Honolulu has been faced with the necessity of imposing such controls as it could upon the wayward tendencies of men "a long way from home;" and islanders have always been somewhat hesitant in extending the traditional Hawaiian hospitality to the unattached males who came from the ships. Conflicts between the "local boys" and the invaders for the favors of Island

girls date almost from the days of Captain Cook. Among the most sensational of these incidents was the so-called "Massie affair" which attracted world-wide attention in 1931. A series of physical encounters occurred between gangs of local youths of various ancestries and Caucasian servicemen and their wives culminating in the Kaahawai incident in which Lt. Massie and a couple of sailors admitted having shot and killed a Hawaiian youth for a supposed unpunished sex offense against Mrs. Massie.

The threat of such conflicts is chronic in Honolulu and it presents a problem to which responsible Island residents are now highly sensitive as affecting both the statehood aspirations of Hawaii and the internal peace of the community. The Territory is not likely to forget the painful trials, sensational publicity, and adverse federal legislation which followed the Massie case.

Tensions between mainland servicemen and local civilians have long existed in Hawaii, but normally they have been restrained to minor assault cases recorded on Honolulu's police docket. During the war such episodes were kept at a minimum by the rigid controls of martial law, including a strict curfew and limitations upon liquor consumption. With the return of civil rule and the decline of patriotic fervor since V-J Day, the old feuds broke out afresh, and the need for taking community action in dealing with the problem was again impressed upon the public. Committees of civilians and of servicemen have been organized, and the newspapers for a time maintained a public box-score of even the most trivial incidents involving servicemen and civilians. Honolulu, following the Damon Tract incident, was threatened with a "crime wave," made to order by a curious and sensitive public.

Street fights and minor brawls—not uncommon in any city where large groups of servicemen seek diversion and relaxation from long periods of duty—increased both in number and in the depth of feeling involved especially following V-J.¹ Sailors, to a far greater degree than soldiers, became involved in such incidents; and in fact the number of fights between soldiers and civilians, never very large, has not increased since the war.² Life in the Navy may be more ex-

¹The data cited in the following footnotes were derived from a study conducted by Mrs. Carolyn S. Peto under the direction of the author and is based upon the records of all assault, affray and disorderly conduct cases involving civilians and servicemen reported to the Honolulu Police between July 1st and November 1st, 1945. Although police records are never wholly complete, it is probable that the number of incidents sufficiently serious to be reported to the police is fairly accurate. The total number of incidents increased from 41 in July to 63 in August, 63 in September, and 60 in October. The number of persons involved was 159 in July, 349 in August, 196 in September and 224 in October. That the number of incidents and of persons involved was no larger after V-J Day in a community involving so many servicemen and civilians is perhaps the most remarkable fact of all.

²The total number of civilian-service clashes reported to the police during the four month period involved 175 sailors (Navy, Coast Guard and Merchant Marine) as defendants as compared to 22 soldiers, 37 marines, and 115 civilians.

citing than for the average doughboy, but it is also much more confining during much of the time. Needless to say, it is only the disorganized minority of both civilians and servicemen who are involved in such incidents. The local hoodlums are chiefly young men between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five, and they are drawn from all the various racial ancestries.³ The servicemen are almost as young, eighty-per cent being under the age of thirty.

The case of assault in which both civilians and service personnel appear tend to follow one of three or four familiar patterns. A lone serviceman returning to camp at night is suddenly surrounded by a half dozen adolescents of Island ancestry, bare-footed, long-haired and with loose shirttails, who maul and rob him and as suddenly disappear into the darkness. A couple of inebriated sailors make familiar passes at a local girl, and they are attacked by a group of civilian bystanders. A serviceman is refused admission to a beer parlor and "takes a swing" at the doorman. An excited soldier or sailor watching a public football game makes an uncomplimentary remark about one of the Oriental contestants and is severely pummelled by a group of Islanders who seem to be waiting for such an occasion.

The following cases are cited directly from the records of the Honolulu police Department during this period and are intended to give the reader something of the flavor of the incidents themselves.

- A. A sailor was walking down Kamakela Lane alone when he was stopped by four local boys. The largest one asked the sailor for a cigarette. The sailor offered him one, and offered a cigarette also to another boy. The boys then asked him if he wanted to get some liquor or women, but before he could answer the question, two of the boys struck him with clubs. The sailor ran in search of an SP. The boys ran away, but were later apprehended. Upon being questioned the next day, the boys admitted that they had participated in the striking of the sailor, but could not give any reason for their action other than that they thought it was fun to gang up on servicemen." (Two Filipinos, aged 19 and 12; one Chinese, aged 17; one Puerto Rican, aged 14.)
- B. Twenty-five local boys of various racial ancestry, aged 13 to 19, all members of a Teen-Age Club, and approximately 150 soldiers were involved in a fracas of major proportion at Farrington High School grounds. On Friday night, August 17th, a group of local boys was walking through the school grounds. The sentry (MP) at the gate flashed a light in their faces and stopped them. An argument began over this. One of the boys was struck by some soldiers present. The local group began throwing rocks in retaliation. Two patients at the Farrington Hospital were hit by the rocks and received minor injuries.

³Over 71 per cent of all the civilian defendants were in this age range and an additional 7 per cent were juveniles under the age of 15. All of the major racial groups in the local population were included with the Hawaiians and part-Hawaiians most highly represented. 45 per cent of the total number of defendants as compared to about 15 per cent of the male civilian population were of Hawaiian or part-Hawaiian ancestry.

The following night, at about 9:30 p.m., another group of boys was walking through the grounds on the same road after having attended a Teen-Age Canteen dance at the Farrington High School grounds. The group was stopped by some soldiers and asked if they were the boys who had thrown the rocks on Friday night. When they answered negatively, one of the soldiers (MP) knocked down two of the boys, and told them to get out of the hospital grounds and stay out. The boys returned to the Canteen and rounded up some more boys. In the meantime, the soldiers contacted their men at the Farrington Hospital to prepare for expected trouble. The soldiers, about 150 strong, came down armed with clubs, bottles, rocks, and other weapons. An argument followed but no blows were struck. The local boys, seeing that they were outnumbered, ran away. The soldiers chased them, but could not catch them.

Since each side was as much fault as the other, and since no major injuries had been received by anyone, all persons involved were discharged.

During the course of investigation, a large group of soldiers were gathered around and various members of the group were heard uttering various things, all of which . . . (amounted) to giving the locals all the trouble they were looking for and then some . . . It was clear that the entire group of men stationed at the hospital either as MP guards or as patients, were all worked up over this incident, and were inclined to break out as a unified group and settle the things once and for all—THEIR WAY!! The situation had ugly possibilities.

- C. While crossing the street, the defendant (Filipino, aged 33) accidentally bumped one of three sailors. He asked for pardon, but the sailors struck him. When he was struck the second time with a whiskey bottle, he took out a knife and stabbed a sailor.
- D. The Honolulu Stadium riot started with many small fights throughout the bleachers, and ended in a mass riot between soldiers, sailors, and civilians. It was impossible to ascertain the beginnings of the fight; and impossible to ascertain the number of persons involved. Six local boys were arrested; six Army Lieutenants were questioned. The servicemen had been drinking. No local boys were seriously injured, but some servicemen were. The local boys declared that the fight started when some sailors called them "punks." The sailors declared that the local boys started swinging first.
- E. Seven juveniles (Hawaiian and Samoan, aged 13 to 17), struck soldiers when the soldiers called them 'black sons of b——s'. The soldiers declared the youths attacked them with no provocation. Both groups apparently were looking for trouble and participated in the fight willingly.
- F. A group of seven local boys (5 of Japanese ancestry and 2 of Portuguese ancestry) drove up to Kuhio Park and got out of a car, drinking beer. One of the boys said, "Let's pick on the first donkey we see and knock the . . . out of him." The boys walked up to two unidentified soldiers who were lying on the sand and kicked some sand on their faces. The soldiers immediately got up and prepared to defend themselves, whereupon the seven boys separated into two groups and set upon these two soldiers.

A basic factor underlying most of these incidents is the widespread disposition of Islanders and servicemen to conceive of each other as out-groups, strangers, and even enemies. It is part of the familiar *Malihini-Kamaaina* (new comer - oldtimer) dichotomy which lies at the root of so much of the behavior and thinking in the Islands. It was strikingly manifested in 1931 when the Navy felt that all the

Islanders, Haoles as well as Hawaiians and Orientals, were combined against them and a ranking admiral, sensitive to an alleged indifference of Islanders to the Navy, declared that the only salvation for Hawaii was government by a commission consisting of men "not imbued too deeply with the peculiar atmosphere of the Islands, men without pre-conceived ideas of the value and success of the melting pot."

The same suspicion and distrust toward the out-group was reflected by Island civilians toward the newly arrived defense-workers and servicemen just prior to the war but it was somewhat effectively submerged during the war by the over-powering opposition to the enemy. Once the threat of a common foe was removed in August 1945, the older internal tensions reappeared.

The racial factor has unquestionably been one of the fairly constant elements in the service-civilian issue for many years. Actually it is difficult to exclude race completely from any important social consideration in Hawaii. During the war servicemen were disposed to apply the opprobrious term "gook" to all non-white civilians and not infrequently the terms "nigger," "slant-eyes," "yellow-belly," "Jap" and other equally objectionable terms were used indiscriminately toward any and all non-Caucasian civilians. This was particularly common among the newly arrived service personnel or among those in large encampments who had been unsuccessful in establishing friendly contacts with local residents.

The large majority of non-Caucasian civilians would hesitate by using such invidious terms as "white-trash" and "damn-Haole," which is comparable to "damn-Yankee" in the South. There is little doubt that irritation at the attitudes of racial superiority freely expressed by men in the service, particularly when under the influence of liquor, was one of the important factors in many of the unprovoked attacks which they suffered at the hands of Island civilians. One young man of Oriental ancestry tersely expressed the feelings of many: "The servicemen act as if Hawaii were conquered territory and as if we owed them respect and homage." The desire for revenge for discriminatory treatment received by local boys in mainland training centers clearly added fuel to the conflict.

Competition for the attentions and affections of Island girls underlay much of the tension between civilians and servicemen during the war and the early post-war period. Local boys frequently lacked the refinement in manners or the skill in courtship possessed by mainland G.I.'s. Because of the overwhelming sex disproportions in Hawaii, most of the servicemen had to direct their romantic appeals to the

local girls if they were to have any feminine companionship whatever. The attentions of the G.I.'s although usually appreciated by the girls were deeply resented by the local boys. Mainland servicemen were successful in winning the hearts of some 1200 Island girls in marriage during the three years ending June 30, 1946, and gossip tends to exaggerate the additional number of local girls who were victimized by servicemen.

The Island zootsuiters who wantonly attacked soldiers and sailors would rationalize their behavior as a means of protecting the honor of their sisters and girl friends. "We don't want our girls to be left holding the sack when the Haoles leave," they would say, "our local girls are push-overs for the 'snow jobs' of the mainland slickers." The public record of 291 illegitimate births during 1945 in which the father was known to be a mainland serviceman indicates that there were some grounds for such fears.

Many of the servicemen, more especially the sailors, developed a distinctly unpleasant taste for the Islands. The recreational facilities were grossly inadequate to meet the needs of so many, while the cheap and tawdry entertainment of Honolulu's honky-tonks was forced on his attention as soon as the servicemen arrived. Relatively few were able to enjoy the advantages of Honolulu's cultural centers or its private homes. Many men felt that curio shops, taxis, restaurants and bars shamelessly robbed them, despite the OPA. The sentiment of a considerable portion of the military visitors to Hawaii was that of the sailor who said, "I'd love every — inch of this rock if it were twelve feet under water."

The general touchiness of the situation in which both civilians and servicemen were anxious to be relieved of wartime restrictions was further aggravated by the free flow of liquor in Honolulu. The records of the Honolulu Police Department although not entirely complete at this point, indicate that at least 63 per cent of the individuals involved in civilian-military assault cases in the four months following July 1, 1945 were completely or partially under the influence of liquor. Excessive drinking was both a symptom and a cause of general post-war unrest.

As the community gradually becomes accommodated to a peace time existence with a marked decline in the number of servicemen and mainland defense workers in the Territory and a similar reduction in the competition for the use of the limited facilities of stores, theaters, and public utilities, the tensions described in this articles also recede in importance.

The basic problems discussed, however, remain and it is well that both civilian and military authorities are constantly alert to the potential dangers involved. As long as Hawaii remains one of America's principal military and naval outposts in the Pacific, the task of reconciling the desires and habits of large groups of young men away from home with the mores and expectations of a stable community is bound to remain a critical one. Specific devices for providing more wholesome recreation for both civilian youth and servicemen and closer collaboration between civilian and military polices, will undoubtedly help. What is ultimately required, however, is a program which will permit the serviceman to become a participating member of the local community.