

## SERVICEMEN IN HAWAII—SOME IMPRESSIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD HAWAII

V. CABELL FLANAGAN

The following article offers some insight on the recurring problem in Hawaii of the relations between servicemen and civilians. The author, himself a serviceman, has drawn upon the free and casual observations of his own associates on various aspects of Island life. This account is not assumed to be exhaustive.—  
Editors

For the past three years, Honolulu, the capital city of the Territory of Hawaii, has been host to an untold number of servicemen from every state of the mainland. This role of being host to visitors is not a new one for the people of Hawaii—before the war the tourist trade was referred to as the fourth largest industry in the Islands, but the arrival of this great new mass of temporary visitors in wartime has produced a new situation.

This group in khaki and white is not like the relatively small group of well-to-do and upper-middle-class vacationers, fairly equally divided as to sex, who came to Hawaii on the Matson luxury liners to vacation in the tropics for a few days or weeks. This service personnel is a tremendously large group, of one sex, representing all social classes, and spending in many cases as much as three years in the local area. This latter group is not made up of twenty-four hour-a-day vacationers, but rather of men who seek, after their work day is through or on their liberty days, relaxation, fun, and the sight of people and places that represent a change from their highly regimented lives while at sea or at their duty stations.

One important parallel between these wartime visitors to the Island and the pre-war tourists is that both are temporary groups here. This much larger group, like the tourists, will someday return to their homes and tell the story of their Hawaiian experience. Will the future of the Territory, her economic and political life, her tourist trade, be boosted or hindered by the reports which will be circulated in every city and town on the Mainland by returning servicemen? Are the thousands of servicemen passing through Hawaii for a few days or those living here as temporary residents, gathering the kind of impressions that will result in pleasant memories and a lasting interest in Hawaii? Or are they developing an embittered feeling toward the people here and the Territory in general to the extent of prompting them to do what they can "to debunk," as one man put it, "the myth of Waikiki Beach, hula girls and palm trees, and blue Hawaiian moonlight."

The Honolulu Advertiser, in an editorial of October 5, 1944, entitled, *Sort Out The Beefs*, recognized that the attitudes of servicemen returning to their homes may affect Hawaii's future.

Beefing about the other fellow's town is an American habit and prerogative which none wishes to deny. Howls about the weather, hospitality, and the way in which the home folks part

their hair are expected and can be shrugged off with complacency. Not so, some of the things that are happening here during war.

These are the things about which the least is heard. Minor discourtesies and extortions which are not worth complaining about in public, but which stick in the craw. For the sake of Hawaii's future, the community would be wise to sort out these beefs and do something about them. A serviceman who looks at his \$50-a-month and a 30-cent hamburger side-by-side may not say anything, but he is going to remember Hawaii for a long, long time.

Whether the attitudes toward Hawaii of some of these returning servicemen are fair or not, granting the impossibility of creating a favorable impression under wartime conditions, is, unfortunately, of less importance than the fact that, undoubtedly, they will have stories to tell to impressionable audiences. Thus it follows that just what their attitudes are now and what they will be when their sojourn in Hawaii is ended are of significance to people interested in Hawaii.

In an attempt to sample these attitudes of servicemen toward Hawaii, comments of some fifty or more men representing every branch of the service have been gathered over a period of nine months. Some of these men were interviewed in a somewhat formal manner—questions from a prepared list being asked and the verbatim answers recorded. However, all men interviewed were not asked all of the questions on the list; rather, questions were selected which seemed to follow up most logically the previous comment of the man being interviewed. Other men were drawn into a conversation on a bus, in a restaurant, in a mess-hall, or on the street; and their comments faithfully recorded at the first available opportunity. In the cases of the men interviewed, most of them were friends or acquaintances of the writer;<sup>1</sup> and because of the natural unrestrained atmosphere under which these interviews were conducted, it is considered that the rapport which existed between the informant and the recorder was particularly conducive to obtaining true and sincerely expressed opinions and attitudes. Also, it is of significance that many of the questions used in interviewing men cover topics that are popular conversation topics among servicemen. One man who answered the questions in a particularly brisk fashion, when questioned about the sincerity of his answers, stated, "I have thought enough about this all along without having to spend a lot of time thinking about it now."

#### *Analysis of Causes or Justifications of Attitudes*

In attempting to analyze in these war years causes or justifications for a serviceman's attitude, there must be taken into consideration at least three major changes which have taken place practically simultaneously in his situation:

(1) He has changed from the freedom of civilian life to the restrictions and regimen of military life. As one man expressed it:

1. This fact is undoubtedly responsible for a heavy weighting of college-trained informants in the sample—Editors.

All of the things that go with the military—the saluting, the wearing of a hat a certain way, the wearing of a certain type of clothing, having to have a pass to come and go, to have some overbearing individual give you hell and you have to stand there and take it. I am not condemning it or upholding it. That is just the way they claim it is necessary to make a fighting unit, and it has its points.

(2) He is living in a wartime world compared to his former life in a peace time world, and the “interruption” to his career just when he feels he is “getting a good start in the world” may develop a certain sense of frustration.

(3) He has left familiar scenes, faces, ways of doing things that were endowed with a sense of rightness for the very reason that they were what he had always known; and he has come to a far away place whose scenes, people, and ways of doing things are strange to him.

Some men in making comments showed that they have analyzed the situation and have pretty well figured out the causes of their attitudes. These men tried to be fair in making comments about the Territory.

I came into this very suddenly. I was drafted under Selective Service in August, 1940, at a time when I expected to be in military service for one year. I wasn't very far sighted, wasn't prepared for what I was getting into, and being conservative I reacted unfavorably to many things.

I definitely have the feeling that it is so entirely different from everything that we have all been used to. I don't know whether that is caused from just being in Honolulu. You might have the same feeling being anywhere away from your own stamping ground.

Well, if I was going to be fair and honest about it, I'd have to say that I can see where there are the facilities here for having a good time, but now they are interfered with by the war. I don't like having duty here or being here in wartime, but to be honest about it that's because of wartime conditions. I miss not having women—nice girls to date, I mean. Of course you can get the other kind. And then, too, I'm just plain homesick. But I can see that this could be a great place for having fun in peace time. To tell you the truth, I haven't had it so bad here.

Most of all I miss my freedom and that isn't caused by being here. It is caused by being in the service. I miss that more than anything—my freedom.

There are many servicemen who are unhappy here and who apparently have neither the inclination nor the ability to figure out the true cause of their unhappiness. Because the Territory provides the geographical setting for their unhappiness, they blame Hawaii and the people here for their predicament, developing sometimes a violent dislike for both the Islands and the entire civilian population. Some of these men quite obviously have not explored their attitudes and do not know what they

think. The following is typical of these highly contradictory, unexplored attitudes:

Question—Do you think you will ever come back here after the war is over?

Well, I hope I'm not that foolish. Some of my friends say you can't live here as long as I have (18 months) and not want to stay here, but the only thing I can say they've got here is the climate. That's the only thing there is. I don't like the economic set-up or the government set-up or anything about it except the climate.

Back where I come from, we're not used to associate with anybody but white people. If you could clear everybody off of the Island and move all whites over here, it would be a lot better.

Question—When you say the "economic set-up," what do you mean—the so-called dominance of the "Big Five"?

Well, that's part of it. I don't think the little fellow has got a chance here. The little fellows get along if they've got their hand in there getting their cut. Some of the fellows tell me we've got the "Big Five" back in the States, too—but I say back there they're not nearly as strong as they are here. They can't be with the anti-trust laws.

Question—You say you're not that foolish. Do you mean that you think that you might be?

Well, to tell you the truth, if I had my wife out here, I'd probably stay here. But as long as I'm married and I know I can get a job when I go back and not have to start all over again from scratch, well, I'd be foolish not to go back.

### *Social Participation Affecting Attitude*

Man, like every other animal, must come to terms with his environment. He must become acclimated. In addition to the process of naturalization in the biotic community, man has to find a place in the human environment and in the economic and social order which his associations with other human beings impose upon him.<sup>2</sup>

In the case of the serviceman who makes his temporary home here, finding a place in the economic order is no problem. The lack, however, of such economic participation increases the problem of finding a place in the social order.

The ability or willingness to enter into or participate in the various aspects of social life in the Territory has a considerable bearing on the resultant attitude and what the man gets out of his Hawaiian experience. The man who is only interested in duplicating those experiences and seeking those pleasures which he knew and liked in his home environment rather than in exerting himself to look for something new, some experience obtainable perhaps only in the Territory, is probably going to be greatly disappointed in Hawaii. Honolulu is just not large enough—not cosmopolitan enough to provide facilities for satisfy-

2. A. B. Hollingshead, "Human Ecology," in R. E. Park (ed.) *Principles of Sociology*, (New York, 1939).

ing a great number of varying tastes and to cater to special likes and dislikes.

A man from Texas, a college graduate, has this to say:

This is the hell-hole of the world. I volunteered to come out—why, I don't know. If I ever come back, it won't be of my own accord; it will be in a box. It's too confining—no New York—no night clubs. In Texas you might go 100 miles in an evening.

This man's further comments reveal that he has never explored the community except for a few downtown stores and some bars. He sees beauty only in the wide open spaces, in rolling hills and far horizons. To him there is beauty in Texas, even in its cactus; but he sees no natural beauty in the Islands. He is "opposed to the whole layout."

In an attempt to explore somewhat more closely the impressions held by servicemen of Hawaii, a series of specific questions were asked. The answers to question 1, "What in particular about the Territory has impressed you most," were varied in detail, although certain features of Hawaii were mentioned by almost all. They usually included remarks about the climate, the scenery or the racial patterns found in the Territory. In almost all cases, the climate was mentioned first. Many disapproved and still others like the "eternal summer." Remarks such as these were included in the answers:

First, climate—second, you are in the mountains and five minutes later you are on the beach. Also nature and the inter-racial mixture.

Naturally, the climate. I am quite sincere when I say that there are many beautiful sights I have seen. I think there are some interesting phenomena—those unique natural structures that stand out—like Diamond Head and the Blowhole. And the construction interests me—the way they build their houses. We don't build ours that way back home. Then there's the way they dress—the college co-eds going barefoot; I'll never get over that if I live to be a million. I have never seen a town where the dress of the people on the street was so strange—so varied—so care-free. The climate is partly responsible for it, I suppose. Aloha shirts, Filipinos in their zoot suits and the goose grease on their long hair.

I don't like the climate; it would make me lazy and indolent.

I was disappointed in Waikiki Beach. Have you ever been to Virginia Beach? Well, you know how that is—a good long stretch of beach and when I came over here and saw that Waikiki Beach just a block long, well, I was really disappointed. And I expected to find grass huts here.

Contrasting comments were received from men who had just recently come to the Islands from opposite directions. A man who had just been in the South Pacific said:

I was in the Ellice Islands before. I hate it here. Oh, it's terrible. There is just enough freedom and everything for you to think you might have something, but the restrictions and the crowds are too much. I would much rather be down on Ellice.

Down there you know what you've got. Then the prices are so high here. It costs you a mint to do anything or go anywhere. If I didn't have photography as a hobby, I guess I would go nuts.

Three young sailors who had been up in the Aleutians said:

This is paradise; this is our second liberty here and you can't beat it. I would like to have permanent duty here.

After where we've been and not to see a tree or anything green, this is wonderful. I would love to stay here.

Get us shore duty here and we would sure appreciate it.

These three men, at the suggestion of some of their shipmates, had just been to Waikiki Beach and thought the U.S.O. was doing "a swell job" there. They had not been to Hotel Street.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that they liked it here and referred to it with such beaming smiles as a paradise seems to indicate that their shipmates who had been here before had nothing but good reports to give them. They did not have a single derogatory word to say about Hawaii; it was apparently inconceivable to them that anything could be said against the place.

Question 2, "What does Honolulu as a community lack that your home community has?" was answered like question 1. Climate, lack of amusement and, of course, girls, were among the most criticized features of Hawaii. The lack of a definite change in the weather or in the seasons seemed to cause some distress. Perhaps the already strict regimentation in their lives served to emphasize this feature. If, for example, there were different seasons, it would mean changes in uniform, in food, in living habits—all of which would certainly reduce the monotony or regimentation of service life.

There is something about seasons back there that just get me. That's one of the things I miss. I am not a lover of winter, but I miss spring and autumn.

I miss the seasons. There is no place in the world that has a worse climate at times than Washington, but I would prefer it every time to this climate.

It seems so dirty here. It is probably because of the war; but when I came out here, I expected to find a place like Miami. Maybe it is because of the war, but that sort of left a mark on me.

One of the interviewed servicemen had this remark to make:

There is no place for a middle class. You either go slumming and go to Yee Hops down in the River Street area or you dress up and go to the Moana.

It is perhaps unusual for such a statement to be made by a serviceman. However, to a certain extent this is true, es-

3. The honky-tonk district of Honolulu boasts of many pin-ball machines, souvenir stands, photograph stands, "Have your picture taken with a hula girl" stands, and hot dog and hamburger stands. These stands are crowded and jammed into as little space as possible. The prices charged at the various amusement stands are exorbitant, but none the less within the reach of the serviceman just back from "down under." They are loosely called the "gyp joints of Honolulu."

pecially in the plantation and rural areas where the owners and managers represent the upper classes and the workers, the lower classes; there is a definite absence of a middle class. In the urban districts, however, as a result of the gradual permeation of the former Oriental laborers into small or well-to-do businesses, there has been a tendency toward somewhat of a middle social group.

Question 3, "Do you feel any sense of isolation in living in the Territory?" revealed a large number who felt "cut off from the rest of the world," but most of them sensed that this feeling was due largely to their being in the service. Some felt that if they were tourists or civilian war workers, they would be less isolated; while still others felt that, regardless of their reason for being here, they would still feel isolated.

The fact that I am in the Navy and take no part in the city life makes me feel isolated. Here I am restricted to my quarters and maybe an occasional trip to the beach. Culturally, I think this place is adequate, though. They have a fairly active museum and there are symphonies. Back home you had the friends to encourage you to get in on all those things. You are very liable here to take an actual dislike to the place. You lose sight of what it could be. You could be fairly happy here and find most of the things you had back home.

Yes, definitely so. It's the big objection I have to living here. That would be the only reason that I wouldn't remain here. I feel confined—cut off.

I have two answers. My very reason for being here, my being in the Navy, I mean, makes me feel isolated. After you are gone from home for a while and make new friends, you don't feel it as much, but I do feel isolated. The fact that this place is surrounded by water doesn't affect me at all. It doesn't seem like it is 2,000 miles away from streamlined trains and all. I would have different answers for all of these if I was a tourist or a civilian working over here. All of these answers are colored by the very fact that I am in the Navy.

You seem hemmed in here. In the States you can take a trip to the West, for instance. Here after you have made a trip around the Islands, there is no place else to go.

Answers to this question were frequently colored by the general weariness and tensions of wartime Hawaii. They felt that service in stores, public transportation systems, mailing procedures, and censorship were the causes for their feeling of isolation and confinement.

I most certainly do feel isolated. After all, it works on this basis; if you want to force your way in you can get what you want out here, but they offer us nothing that we don't go out and demand from them.

I don't like the idea of our mail taking a week to get to us and all. People that live here have such a hard time getting back and forth to the Mainland.

I don't think it actually lacks anything; it is just inadequate

for the war conditions—not enough facilities to accommodate the people because of the war crowds. In ordinary times I don't think it would lack anything as a city except one thing. I like things on time—radio programs, movies, and things of that nature. Of course, underneath all of it there is the feeling that it is an island—you do feel cut off from the rest of the world.

Question 4 concerned the racial patterns of Hawaii and the impressions they have made on servicemen. It was quite clear the majority interviewed did not find the social pattern here to be either markedly pleasing or objectionable, although there were many indications of it seeming interesting. The men apparently were accepting their lot as bearable on a purely temporary basis, although they would have objected to the same experiences on the mainland or if they had seemed likely to continue.

I would say I was indifferent to it. I have no feeling about it whatsoever. I have no trouble living with them and yet I don't think they are anything super. I imagine it would be different if I had selected this community as a home; I certainly would treat it differently.

The fact that I don't intend to stay here makes me indifferent to it. I wouldn't want the same thing in my own home town. The fact that I don't intend to be here so long and I am not in too close contact with them—I am indifferent. I wouldn't go so far as to say that it is objectionable; it is not pleasing, and for the present, it is a bit interesting just for the experience of living amongst all types.

It certainly isn't pleasing; I wouldn't say that it is objectionable and I am certainly not indifferent to it. Also if I was home, there would be certain racial elements that wouldn't please me. Alien elements—the Filipinos, Japanese, Koreans—they are here in the Territory because of the desire of so-called business to get cheap labor or because they were invited in by the politicians of the United States; and poor Hawaii just has to sit here and take it. I can't say that these Filipinos or Japanese are extremely repulsive and I can't say that I am actually indifferent to them. I am indifferent to the extent that I can go about my little routine and they can go about theirs and we don't come to any fisticuffs.

You will have to say that it is interesting, but I think it would certainly become objectionable to you if you had to put up with it for any length of time. I do think the inter-marriages are interesting. One girl might be about six blooming races.<sup>4</sup>

In response to question 5 as to whether the Territory has grown or diminished in their affections in the time they have spent here, many men expressed themselves in a particularly spontaneous and sincere fashion. The affirmative answers were short, such as "Definitely yes," "Yes," "Grown," "I think a lot more of the place now after being here eighteen months."

A typical example of a negative answer was that of an

4. These comments are much more objective than one would find in a general cross section of service personnel—Editors.

Army sergeant who had been here eighteen months:

No, it hasn't grown in my affections. I haven't been acclimatized to it. I am constantly under the influence of homesickness. I can't say I have grown fonder of it as the months went by. Were I here of my own accord, my opinions might be modified.

I don't feel a closeness because I don't feel a part of it. I am one of a mass which is a necessary evil; but the longer I have been here, the more I should say I like it. Maybe it is just that I have become resigned to it, but I don't think as a member of the armed forces you can become a part of any community.

That's hard to answer due to things before I got here. I had certain ideas about the place and it didn't live up to my expectations. I like it more and more all the time.

A follow up question, "What did you expect to find here?" brought this answer:

I expected it to be more or less a village and hula girls running around and no automobiles. It is practically like Washington in some aspects—all modern—I expected it to be primitive.

This man obviously did not answer the question asked, but instead compared what he expected to find in Honolulu with what he did find. This sort of comparison, however, was quite typical of other servicemen. Many of the men had never heard of the Island of Oahu until they landed on it—had no idea that Honolulu was on the Island of Oahu.

#### *Servicemen-Civilian Attitudes*

Often answers to the five questions listed above led to further discussion, and other important attitudes were revealed. Among other topics, the civilian-servicemen relationship in Hawaii was frequently discussed at length.

The civilian population tends inevitably to consider servicemen on a categorical out-group basis, and as a result the servicemen are quite likely to lose the steadying influence of a set of "normal expectations" to conduct themselves after the civilian pattern. This attitude is illustrated in the comment of a well educated and cultured kamaaina Haole who, in a discussion of the servicemen's patronage of houses of prostitution in Honolulu, remarked that a serviceman seen entering such an establishment was shielded by his uniform from the criticism usually accorded civilians frequenting such places. He insisted further that even if the man in the uniform was recognized by a civilian friend on entering or leaving such a place, it would not be held against him because the man in uniform was expected to frequent such places.

The serviceman craves privacy and individuality above all else, but few have the means of attaining it. During the greater part of each twenty-four hours, he is only a number—there are thousands of others just like him; his personal life, his likes and dislikes, are only important in so far as they blend and conform with those of the group. In addition to the clothes he wears and the food he eats, the normal treatment he receives from the civilian population is also strictly "G.I." It must be this way; the great number involved makes anything else an im-

possibility.

The question, "Do you think that being here as a member of the Armed Forces causes you to feel differently toward the Territory than if you were here as a civilian?" brought forth the following typical answers:

There is a barrier built up against the servicemen by the Haoles and a lack of enjoyment in associating with the Orientals.

I know of no one who has really enjoyed being here other than those people who have forced themselves in. I think there is enjoyment to be had with the Haoles, but the people keep the doors closed. There is no invitation to come in and I am not going to knock on anybody's door and ask to come in. It is their home, not mine.

You are not taken in as a social member of the community, but a civilian might receive social invitations here. A civilian can get in on social events even though there are officers present, but you can be a very good friend of theirs and the fact that you are an enlisted man, they just can't ask you.

I think if we were out here under different circumstances, the attitudes of those people would be different toward us. I am branded, whatever I do; there is a certain barrier that has to be broken down wherever you go. I think it is to some extent broken down at the University.

The people who are anything on the Islands want nothing to do with servicemen. I think the uniform makes the difference. They feel that we are imposing by being here; and as far as I am concerned, I would be glad to give it back to the Japs.

Many of the servicemen were sufficiently objective to recognize the sources of the prejudice against them. Two sailors attached to a submarine who were staying at the Royal Hawaiian for a two-week rest had these comments to make:

I like it here. Of course I think the fact that I am wearing a uniform works against me, in fact, in view of the long time the servicemen have been around here, I wonder why the people associate with sailors at all. On a crowded bus sometimes when there are rowdies cutting up, the people shun us; but if you get away from the heart of town where most of the sailors are—get out into the outlying districts—you get much better attention—better service in restaurants and the people are just more free in general.

I like it here fine. It is the large number of servicemen here that makes the difference. It was the same way in Champlain, Illinois, where I was stationed first. When I first got there and there were only about fifteen sailors in town, we had it plenty swell; they didn't even have a shore patrol for months. But then after the large number came in, they tried to see just how much they could get away with and then that meant I had to suffer.

A "CB" said:

Here you spend a lot of money and have no good times to show for it. I imagine that after the war—after all the servicemen get away—that the place wouldn't be too bad.

A few men in this sample felt this criticism of the civilian population was unfair and unwarranted.

### Summary

Thus a brief study of attitudes toward various phases of life in Hawaii shows that many factors have entered to influence the thinking and feeling of the servicemen interviewed. The abnormal wartime conditions—the sudden change from a free, civilian life to a rigid, military life, the strange environment into which these men have been placed, new people, new scenes, new standards—have all entered into the process of attitude formation. Some of the men have shown deep insight and attempts to understand the factors involved in this process, while others have not bothered to analyze the causes of much of their feelings.

Experiences in the Islands and the amount of social participation of the servicemen in the community life have had much to do in creating favorable or unfavorable attitudes toward the people and life in Hawaii. Those that have had the opportunity to mingle with the island residents, and those who have approached the local people without prejudice and with sincere interest and desire to know them have given many favorable comments about the Islands. Others who have not had the opportunity or who have not given themselves a chance to get into the various aspects of island life have formed unfavorable attitudes toward everything on "the rock."

Most of the servicemen have been greatly impressed by the warm climate, although, at the same time, they have missed the seasons of the mainland. Many have found the Territory lacking in many things—recreational facilities, natural beauty, and, especially, companionship of women.

Many have revealed unfavorable attitudes over the question of the racial situation in Hawaii. Although they have outwardly said that they have no strong objections to the multi-racial groups in Hawaii, they seem to feel inwardly that they would not tolerate such a situation if they were permanent residents here, or if such a situation were to exist back home on the Mainland. Such attitudes may mean that previous prejudices have been brought here from the Mainland, and the outward denial of objections to the Island situation may mean temporary accommodation to the racial situation in the Islands. They may also mean that the men are just homesick and are tired of the people and "the rock."

It is interesting to note that the civilians' attitudes toward the servicemen have played some part in the reaction of the servicemen. The categorizing of servicemen into one group by the local people has made the servicemen more keenly aware of their loss of individuality. They feel the lack of regard for them as individuals, and they express strongly the desire to be regarded as individuals and not "G.I.'s." Many of them feel that their attitude toward the Islands would be different if they were here during normal times as civilians and not as uniformed men. Their immediate desire is to return to the mainland to their folks and friends and to be ordinary civilians once more.