

Contributed by Ron Neish

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U.S.S. KAULA (AG33)
FPO, San Francisco, Calif.



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Navy Department
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From: Commanding Officer.
To: Secretary of the Navy.
Subj: Letter of Transmittal.
Ref: (a) ALPAC 202.
Encl: (A) History of U.S.S. KAULA (AG33).

ALL INFO. FROM
EXOS MAIL ROOM

1. In accordance with reference (a), Enclosure (A) is forwarded herewith.

R. A. Young
R. A. YOUNG,
By direction.

cc: CincPac



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HISTORY OF U.S.S. KAULA

The U.S.S. KAULA (AG33), (Ex. KAULAHE), (Ex. CUBAHAMA) was built by Henry Robb, Ltd., Leith, Scotland in 1938.

The Merchant Vessel CUBAHAMA owned by the Balboa Shipping Company, Inc., was on the 3rd day of January 1941, delivered at the Bethlehem Shipbuilding Co., Baltimore, Maryland to the United States Navy (5th Naval District). Outfitting and conversion period was from 3 January 1941 to 25 January 1941. Date of commissioning was 3 January 1941.

Statistics of the ship are: Length, 267 feet; Beam, 38 feet; Engines, (2) Diesel; Displacement, 2100 tons; Gross Tonnage, 2468 tons; Top Speed, 15 knots; Range at Top Speed, 4095 miles; Cruising Speed, 12 knots; Range at Cruising Speed, 5676 miles; Economical Speed, 10 knots; Range at Economical Speed, 9000 miles; Diesel Fuel Capacity, 45,000 gals.; Water Capacity, 27,770 gals.; Armament, 1 - 4" .50 cal., 2 - 3" .50 cal., and 4 - .50 cal. machine guns.

In January 1941 the U.S.S. KAULA sailed from Baltimore, Maryland, through the Panama Canal to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Honolulu Harbor became the home port and she operated from there to all the islands of the 14th Naval District and several other outlying islands. Cargo consisted of miscellaneous materials.

On 26 May 1945 she docked at Seattle, Washington for general repairs and overhaul. This was her first time to dock in the United States since her departure in 1941. Upon completion of the overhaul period she was assigned duty under the 17th Naval District Coast Guard.

At the present time the KAULA is operating in the 13th Naval District under cognizance of the Port Director.

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ENCLOSURE (A)

On 7 December 1941, I was a Lieutenant Commander and commanding officer of the USS Kaula (AG-33), a small cargo ship. We were based in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and had been operating since March 1941 under the orders of the Port Director (Commander Derx). The Kaula had a complement of 7 officers and 68 men. The ship was the only one making regular trips to Johnston Island (to the west of Oahu) and Palmyra Island to the south. There was a small naval air base being developed on each of these islands. The Kaula was the largest ship which could navigate the small entrance channels, with a draft of 16½ feet maximum.

We performed the duties of many auxiliary ships in one vessel, unloading men, stores, provisions (including fresh and frozen) and gave them all the diesel oil we could spare, allowing just enough to make a return trip on our twin diesels. We even supplied ammunition for the small defensive armament.

We entered Palmyra Harbor on the morning of the 7th of December and soon got the word that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. Naturally all of us were stunned at this news. I also got despatch orders detaching me from Kaula and to report to Cavite. This was soon cancelled as the attack on the island of Luzon was not long delayed. Normally we could unload and go back in about three days. This time it was stretched out to about five because of the difficulty in working at night with dimmed lighting. There were many rumors of the possibility of Jap subs in the vicinity (none were, of course).

Returning to Pearl Harbor we ran darkened ship at night and on zigzag courses. Shortly before we got back, we were given a small escorting ship to lead us in after daylight. The scene in the harbor was horrible and unbelievable. Battleship row was in a mess. The Arizona had blown up from the Jap bombing and torpedo attack. The only battleship to get underway on the 7th was the Nevada which then ran aground near the entrance. The destroyer Shaw, in drydock with the battleship Pennsylvania, had been hit and then blew up. On the far side (west) of Ford Island the target ship Utah had turned over on its side. Fortunately, none of the aircraft carriers were in port for the weekend of the attack. This was just about the only element of the Jap plan that failed to be accomplished.

My relief was waiting for me and it did not take long to turn over command. I then joined a pool of officers awaiting new orders from the Navy Department and I found myself attached to the Port Director's office. Their personnel was growing in leaps and bounds as their organization quickly expanded. I was number three (the senior one under the Port Director and his Exec) and in charge of operations. Communications officers came and went as fast as we could train them. This was temporary duty for me, but my permanent orders did not come in for six months - it could have been any day.

My wife Darrell joined the WARDS (Women's Air Raid Defense) and was on duty at the Army's radar plot at Fort Shafter.

All night duty for us Navy people was every fourth night. My main job was to make out an operation schedule for our allotment of 4 escort light mine layers. It reminded me of running a bunch of switch engines. Escorts were needed for interisland work as well as for two reinforcing escorts at the 50 mile circle from Honolulu. There were two small interisland merchant ships which transferred supplies between the islands, mainly between Honolulu and Hilo. They also had to have an escort. But the Jap subs did not reappear in Hawaiian waters. One sub did manage to get off the West Coast and fire a few shells near Santa Barbara.

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