

FEBRUARY, 1942, 'BATTLE' STILL CONTROVERSIAL

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HIDING A FACTORY —In 1940 Lockheed's aircraft plant was easily seen from the air. But things changed in 1942 —sometime at-

ter "the great air raid" —when a three-dimensional scene was painted over the plant to give it the appearance of a residential



area. On Feb. 25, 1942, when guns were fired at non-existent planes, battery crews on the roof did not join the bombardment.
Lockheed California Co. photos

FEBRUARY, 1942, 'BATTLE' STILL CONTROVERSIAL

Air Raid That Wasn't Set Off Guns, Confusion and Hot Words

BY DONNA SCHEIBE
Times Staff Writer

Just 37 years ago today, on Feb. 25, 1942, at 2:23 a.m., the "battle of Los Angeles" began. It left a controversy easy to reopen even today.

The clear, cold moonlit night permitted Burbank and Glendale residents, wakened by new air raid sirens and the earth jittering beneath them, a viewing of fireworks unlike any they had seen or expect to see again.

It is remembered variously as "Spectacular!", "Exciting!" and "Terrifying."

Pacific Coast residents were jumpy enough, two months after Pearl Harbor. A Japanese I-17 submarine surfaced at Elwood just above Santa Barbara on Monday, Feb. 23, and lobbed 15 poorly aimed shells into the Bankline oil field and refinery, damaging a dock and well pump and barely missing a gasoline tank, according to F. W. Borden, spokesman for Bankline.

The fact that this occurred in the middle of a 7 p.m. fire-side chat by President Franklin D. Roosevelt indicated that the attack was intended to heighten nervous reaction following a full week of dismal news for the Allies.

Singapore was falling and the Dutch East Indies was issuing desperate appeals to the Anzacs (Australia-New Zealand Army Corps) to save them. Nazi submarines sank six oil tankers, including the Socony-Vacuum Rochester with all hands, off the Atlantic seaboard and shelled the U.S. oil refinery in the West Indies.

U.S. Atty. Gen. Francis Biddle had asserted on Feb. 16 that leaks of American aircraft plans were endangering the war effort and implored citizens to watch the West Coast for enemy subs.

All of which set the stage for a generally edgy military defense operation, not to mention the Civilian Defense Corps which had its first practices with the new sirens and World War I-issue gas masks and canvas litter.

Southern California awoke to a first-stage, or yellow, alert on Tuesday morning, Feb. 24, after the shelling. The streets were filled with Army convoys heading north and Glendale papers announced memorial services for the following Sunday for local men killed at Pearl Harbor and in the Philippines.

The 4th Interceptor (fighter) Command had established three alert stages. Yellow signified unidentified aircraft or naval activity. Blue indicated enemy aircraft had been identified, and red relayed word that identified enemy were headed in the direction of a specific locale.

The yellow alert had been nullified by midnight Tuesday when Joseph Ferrick, senior bookkeeper for Burbank, went to work at City Hall.

Ferrick was centralizing and standardizing the accounting system for the city of nearly 38,000 residents, working from midnight to 9 a.m. He worked nights in order to complete the accounting done that day.

Howard I. Stites was city manager, Ferrick recalled, and thus drew the post of civilian defense coordinator for the area.

Stites and Ferrick agreed that since Ferrick would be in City Hall, he would be responsible, in a raid, for manning the large siren just erected atop the building.

The first report of a blue alert from the 4th Interceptor Command (bypassing yellow altogether) came to Ferrick by telephone from the Montrose sheriff's substation just long enough ahead of the red for him to telephone Stites and waken him.

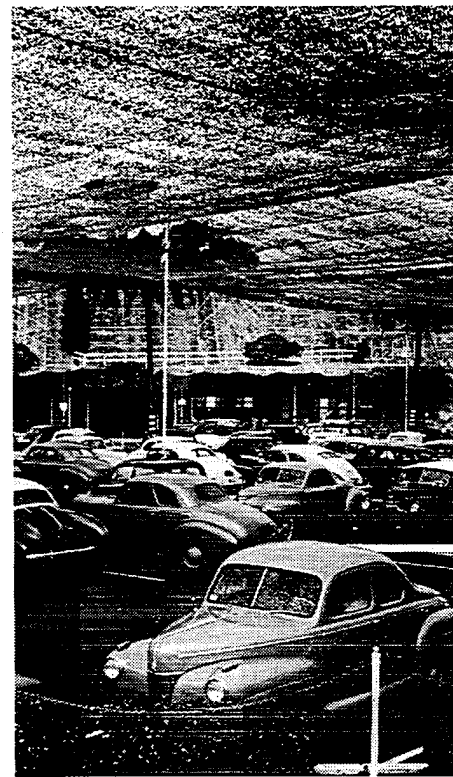
"He barely had the tops off his pajamas when the red call came through and, he said, 'Joe, push the button,'" Ferrick recalled.

That was easier said than done. The only test of the siren had been for sound—a long, steady wail similar to the later familiar "all clear." No one had yet worked out making the undulating pitch signaling an imminent raid.

Equal to the occasion, Ferrick whipped out a large, old-fashioned Westclox stop watch with color quadrants and hit the siren at full wail, let it die down, and hit it again, thus producing the rising sound which "scared the life out of me," according to Thelma Ehring, who lived then on Naomi St. near Olive Ave.

In the blacked-out City Hall, Ferrick called his wife, Eugenia, and told her to take daughters Lynne, 5, and Ann, 2, with her next door to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Myron Vittetoe. Mrs. Ferrick turned on the lights as she awoke but quickly switched them off and stumbled over

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PLENTY OF ROOM. —Lockheed employees parked their cars under wire which was painted green.



REMEMBRANCES. —Joseph Ferrick, left, and Harvey C. Christen have memories of the "air raid."
Times photos

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the dark lawn. The children were put to bed with cookies for comfort and Mrs. Ferrick and the Vittetoes stood in front of their homes on Orchard Drive and watched the night sky laced with tracers, explosions and probing searchlights in Los Angeles to the east.

In Glendale, Abe Kaminsky, 18, and Al Turace, 19, raced out into the night on Glenwood Road in front of Hoover High School and watched the display.

Kaminsky told reporters for the afternoon newspapers that he and Turace, members of an after-midnight riveting class at Hoover, felt the ground "jitter" and could see but not hear the bursts of anti-aircraft guns in Los Angeles and on the south coast.

Mrs. Mary Jane Strickland, a real Rosie the Riveter for final assembly at Lockheed Aircraft, where the Hudson bomber was being built for England, slept at home through the action.

Later alerts in which searchlights scanned the skies over Burbank's hills gave her "such a scarey feeling." She recalled that by war's end there were five siren locations in Burbank and an anti-aircraft battery was stationed at Oak St. and Reese below her home.

A Lockheed employee who was glad he had stayed up late working out at the Pasadena Athletic Club is Harvey Christen, now retired and living in Alhambra. Christen said the action was unforgettably spectacular from the clubhouse roof.

"Of course after the excitement died down the next day, and everybody had a 'raid' story, there were suspicions that it might have been planned to wake America up; no one ever did seem to know what set it off," Christen said.

Frank Knox, secretary of the Navy, helped to fuel the suspicions when he announced on Thursday, Feb. 26, that the whole thing had been a false alarm, thus starting a word-war with Secretary of War Henry Stimson that lasted clear through a congressional investigation called for by the House Military Affairs Committee and editorials in Washington papers.

In the Army history "The Defense of the Western Hemisphere," there is

a theory that apparently backed Stimson's contention that there had been as many as five unidentified planes over Los Angeles. The work was published in 1962.

Air Force archives disclosed that year that the Western Defense Command in March, 1942, gave the official version of from one to five unidentified aircraft over Los Angeles during the "attack." The report suggested they may have been piloted by civilians who were afraid to admit they had accidentally triggered the firing of 1,440 rounds of ammunition into the skies over the Los Angeles basin.

However, the Air Force history also contended that the alarm may have been caused by "meteorological balloons known to have been released over Burbank."

"It seemed like the real thing to us at the time," said Donald Tuttle, then a Lockheed employee who was an air raid warden in the Pico-Fairfax area of Los Angeles.

"It looked like some king of slow-moving object caught up there in the lights, definitely heading off toward the Palos Verdes direction," Tuttle recalled.

"We were all keyed up, on the alert, there had been the shelling up near Goleta the day before, the reports of a sub off Manhattan Beach

Rising sound of air raid siren 'scared the life out of me.'

and one was supposed to have been blown to bits Christmas Day off the coast. I think a pilot received a citation for that."

Tuttle was in Lockheed's personnel department and when he saw the intense firing near Douglas Aircraft in Santa Monica he could imagine the same happening at "our beloved Lockheed," he said.

But the Lockheed guns were silent, though there were many installations, some real ones on the roof, and some were only wooden mock-ups. The superb camouflage was completed at the plant later that year, according to Robert Ferguson, now the company's chief photographer. It is still possible for old-time employees to point out the



DONALD TUTTLE

... looked like real thing.

Times photo

roof locations where batteries of men scanned the sky that night but kept their heads and did not join the frantic bombardment.

Stimson and the Los Angeles Police Department gave lavish praise to the 10,000 air raid wardens and auxiliary police officers called to duty in the blackout, which extended from the Mexican Border to the San Joaquin Valley until 7:21 a.m.

"People were supposed to be kept off the streets, but they came out anyway," Tuttle said. "We had a good view of the sky, it was so clear and cold." He warned his wife, Marion, to stay in the house with their three children; with blackout curtains drawn and no lights.

Mickey McCann, a Burbank police officer on duty that dawn, recalled that in enforcing the blackout it was his horror to discover that a chicken farm at Hollywood Way and San Fernando Road had lights burning to keep the chickens laying 'round the clock. Farmers, rising to milk cows, also turned on lights in the eerie silence when the firing stopped at dawn. McCann also had to demand a shutdown of lights at McClure Winery on Scott Road.

The farmers compromised by using hooded kerosene lanterns to relieve the confused and noisy cows in stalls.

While the police managed reasonably well in spite of the curious people on streets and in yards or driving,

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some wardens in their zeal to eliminate targets shot out or otherwise destroyed traffic signals, leaving the city with a monumental traffic jam in the morning.

Los Angeles began to pick up the pieces when the all-clear sounded in first daylight. Shrapnel had fallen in numerous backyards and shattered a bed from which the owners had just tumbled in a home on W. 43rd St. There were some casualties. Five persons died of heart attacks or falls and a Pasadena warden broke his hip in a fall.

Unconfirmed reports that an airplane had been shot down and was guarded from view and then removed from a slough at 185th St. and Vermont Ave. were never verified.

Christen pointed out that he never heard anyone say whether the shells fired into the oil field at Elwood were

analyzed to determine if they were Japanese.

The Army history declared that it was at least a possibility that the I-17 submarine had carried a light seaplane. It was known the vessel was equipped to carry such aircraft.

Real suffering was inflicted on the city's Japanese-American citizens. Arrests occurred in Pasadena, Long Beach, East Los Angeles and at the Venice pier. Real or imagined reports of refusal to turn out lights during the blackout were listed as reasons, but in most instances imposed fines were suspended by the end of the week.

By March it was revealed that less than one-fourth of Los Angeles' \$50,000 worth of new air raid sirens was functioning when the red alert came.

"Burbank's worked just fine," Ferrick recalled. It also worked for the all-clear. Mrs. Ferrick heard it, took her daughters home, and was so



MRS. EUGENIA FERRICK
... nervous over 'raid.'

Times photo

keyed-up she did a whole week's ironing before she sat down to rest.

Still demanding an explanation in March, the Washington Post issued an editorial stating that for "sheer

dizziness" the like of the raid was unequaled.

Los Angeles Mayor Fletcher Bowron, with 1940 GOP standard bearer Wendell Willkie and Stimson rallying behind him, said that even if it had been only a practice Los Angeles was proud to have been the guinea pig which provided the public with confidence to know the Army was here in force, ready to do its job.

"I don't suppose anyone ever really will know," Christen said. "But it wasn't anything those who saw it are likely to forget."