

Cover Story

# Pearl Harbor sent shock wave to Central Coast

By Dan Krieger  
Focus Columnist

December 7, 1941 ... Paul Kurokawa and his wife, Betty, were visiting Paul's parents, Tom and Mary Kurokawa in Pismo Beach.

Paul, a native of San Luis Obispo, had just purchased a ranch market at the intersection of Western and Redondo Beach boulevards in Gardena. He received his college education at Meiji University in Tokyo.

He had recently spoken to a history class at his alma mater, San Luis Obispo High School. On the basis of his observations during his long stay in Japan, Paul declared that there would never be a war between Japan and the United States.

From what Paul could observe, the Japanese armed forces were tied down in China. Foodstuffs and other important commodities were severely rationed in Tokyo.

And Paul felt that the vastness of the Pacific Ocean reduced the likelihood of a conflict. Both he and Betty were stunned when they heard the mid-Sunday afternoon announcement of the Japanese strike against Pearl Harbor during a motion picture show at the Santa Maria Theatre.

Alice and Avice Wilkinson were equally shocked. They were USO volunteers attending a Sunday open



Recruits arrived at Camp San Luis, above, following the strike on Pearl Harbor. Right, Avis and Alice Wilkinson with Pfc. Paul Leachman at



the result of events half an ocean away.

Avice and Alice Wilkinson were relative newcomers to San Luis Obispo. They had followed their parents from Indiana to the Central Coast in June 1941.

Their mother had a sister who lived in Long Beach. The sister had written east and described both the climate and the war-preparedness economic boom which prevailed in California.

Their stepfather, Edgar Thornton, was a baker. He had answered an ad for a supervising baker at the Peerless Bakery in San Luis Obispo.

The twins decided to join their parents here in the spring of 1941. There was no longer a reason for Avice to stay in Indiana since her fiancé was going into the service in July. The girls rode west with a man from Burbank.

Avice was a trained secretary. San Luis Obispo didn't have a large office economy in those days, so she found work at the Western City Pharmacy and Soda Fountain at Chorro and Higuera streets. The establishment was famous for home-cooked style food and had a big lunch counter clientele.

Identical twins were a rarity in San Luis Obispo, especially young, pretty redheads. Alice and Avice had a marvelous time during that last summer of peace on the Central Coast

house at Camp San Luis Obispo, one of the largest military training facilities in the United States.

The identical twin sisters had just finished lunch in one of the camp's mess halls. Alice had been dating Pfc. Paul Leachman. Paul was giving a demonstration on how to field strip a .50-caliber heavy machine gun when the news came blaring over the camp's loudspeaker system.

The army post went on immediate alert. Avice broke down in tears. She was scheduled to leave San Luis Obispo on Dec. 12, 1941. She was to go by bus to Wichita Falls, Texas, where she was going to marry her hometown beau from Portland, Ind., Lt. Issac E. Boniface.

Lt. Boniface was attending a U.S. Army-Air Corps flight mechanics' school at Wichita Falls. Avice was convinced that with the outbreak of war in the Pacific, her fiancé would

Camp San Luis, just minutes before loud speakers announced the Dec. 7 attack.

be sent to some secret destination before they could be married.

Forty-four years later, Avice Wilkinson Boniface Nolan, now retired and living in San Luis Obispo, recalls how her "date" for the Camp San Luis Obispo open house, Pfc. Jack Greenberg, put his arms around her and tried to cheer her up.

Avice Nolan also remembers how she and her sister were the last visitors to get off the post. Privates Leachman and Greenberg had driven them out to Camp San Luis. With the base on alert, they had to take a taxi back to town.

Cars filled with townspeople were



lined up at the gate. Wives, fiancées, brothers, sisters and anxious parents were waiting, hoping to see their beloved soldiers in the camp's 40th Division before they were sent off to their nation's defense.

The visitors couldn't get past the gate, and the line of cars stretched along the old narrow highway all the way back into San Luis Obispo.

The lives of thousands of Central Coast residents were changing as

Alice and Avice met one other set of identical twin girls: Marjory and Minnie Adams, who lived in the Nipomo Street structure which last housed Gene Reis' Colonial Chapel and now is used by Unity Church.

Alice would march alongside Marjory with Avice and Minnie following in a jaunty tandem. The twins would parade outside the downtown drinking establishments. They would burst into laughter as slightly inebriated soldiers would stare in confused amazement, thinking that they were seeing double.

The girls were fascinated by San Luis Obispo. They had never heard a language other than English spoken back home in Indiana. Now they were in a town where they regularly heard people conversing in Chinese, Japanese, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese.

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## Olde Port Inn softens hard-rock image to relax atmosphere

Rock clubs, like radio stations, often change their format.

Los Angeles has seen a lot of this. Take the Troubadour. Once upon a time the Byrds and early Eagles played there. Now it's a head-banging heavy-metal haven. The same goes for the Country Club in Reseda.

But a change isn't necessarily bad. The Whisky-a-Go-Go in Hollywood went through a variety of personas, featuring fine music throughout. The club closed as a punk venue, a far cry from its Buffalo Springfield and The Doors days.

The Olde Port Inn at Port San

Luis is undergoing a change, too, moving from harder to softer rock.

What happened is the club found itself in a paradox.

Its rock 'n' roll concerts, such as the recent David Lindley rave-ups, were doing great, said Alex Kizanis, who does the club's booking. But the place is first and foremost a restaurant.

"It was a heavy conflict between a fine seafood restaurant and a bar," he said. "On Sundays, for example, people would come out to eat and it would just be crazy. Someone would show up at 6 o'clock to have dinner, and they'd run into people really drunk or loud music."

### Mark Brown SLO Rock



So for now at least the restaurant will book quieter shows.

"I'm not saying we won't do Lee Ritenour, Elvin Bishop or anyone like that," he said. "We're just on hold with our shows right now. Our

shows will still be rock 'n' roll; we're not going to change our whole format."

But Kizanis and owner Barry Cohen want the Olde Port to be a place to "have a quiet drink and not

have to put up with rock 'n' roll mania," Kizanis said.

"A major factor was the volume," he said. "When you play rock 'n' roll, you've got drums and five musicians playing. It's usually just a little loud."

The Central Coast music scene is small enough that the Olde Port's change is going to make a difference, especially in light of what other promoters are doing.

The Spirit is still going strong, despite a fairly light December schedule. The Fabulous Thunderbirds gig on the 18th is going to be a

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