

Unit 34: Nauru- Pleasant Island Invaded

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This story was told by Mrs Agnes Harris, who was young at the time of the first landing of the Japanese in 1943. She says this is a day she will never forget.

"I vividly remember the first day a Japanese warship arrived in Nauru. I was nine years old at the time and we lived here in Boe District. While preparing for my evening bath, I heard our neighbours yell that a ship had arrived. I ran to the Gallab channel to watch the ship come in.

At the beach, women sat grating coconut for their children to oil themselves before bathing in the sea. There was a festive feeling on the beach, as we waited for the ship. Everyone cheered loudly when the ship appeared closer to the channel through the fringing reef along the shore.

As the ship neared the Harbour, police warned people to leave the beach immediately. We couldn't understand why, as the arrival of any ship was always welcomed. Suddenly, the sea exploded, as a warning shot had been fired from the ship. People scattered in all directions, screaming and shouting from sheer panic and confusion. Another explosion followed, and the oil tanks in Aiwo District were hit. We could see fire and smoke in the sky.

This time I was so scared I started vomiting. My cousins helped me home. My parents felt it would be safer to move further away from the Harbour. That evening, we packed and left our beautiful home to join relatives in the Meneng District.

Things changed quickly. The Japanese landed with their war tanks. They patrolled the Island, threatening everyone and forcing us to bow down to them. They took over most of our houses on the Island, including our beautiful home. We lost our home and were living in constant fear everyday. Gone was our carefree life."

(Note: Japanese bombers taking off from the Marshall Islands had previously bombed parts of Nauru in December 1941 in the week after Pearl Harbour. In February 1942, Europeans and Chinese were evacuated to Australia. At the end of March 1942, five Japanese ships arrived and landed more than a thousand Japanese troops.)