



## Dub's Corner

### **The 1941 Shrine Bowl and the Attack on Pearl Harbor**

by JW Day

Imagine you played football for a small college on the West Coast in 1941. You just finished an 8-2 season including six shutouts, won your conference championship, outscored your opponents 218-14 and put 11 players on the all-conference team. You would think you deserved a little reward for a season like that and Willamette College, located in Oregon, felt the same way. They scheduled a final game against The University of Hawaii and planned to enjoy their share of rest and relaxation. On December 6, 1941, Hawaii beat the visiting team from Oregon 20-6 in the Shrine Bowl before 24,000 fans. The following morning the team was traveling back to port and the four day cruise home-until the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.



Wanting to contribute to the defense of the island in any way the team could, Coach Roy S. 'Spec' Keene volunteered his team's services to the Army. The Army gladly accepted Keene's offer and each player was issued an antiquated bolt-action Springfield M1903 rifle commonly used during the First World War. They were given a brief training session and told to defend the beach against Japanese invaders. They strung barbed wire and waited, though no attack came. They were then asked



to guard a school 24 hours a day the Army had converted into ammunition depot. After being relieved of duty, the team was without a way home, until the coach managed to barter his way onto the SS Calvin Coolidge, a cruise liner turned floating hospital. The SS Coolidge was headed for San Francisco loaded with badly burned soldiers who needed immediate medical attention. In exchange for a passage home, Keene's team helped tend to 1,200 gravely wounded servicemen. The ship was already 400 passengers over its maximum load before Keene struck his deal. 19 days later, the floating hospital pulled into San Francisco Bay on Christmas Day. Shortly after docking, every member of the team enlisted to join the fight. All but one, Bill Reder, survived the war. In 1997, the entire 1941 Willamette football team was inducted into the school's Athletic Hall of Fame. In 2000, ESPN aired the team's story on "NFL Films Presents."

