

WFWP USA: 16th Anniversary - Healing Community at National Cemetery of the Pacific

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The Tragedy

Early on the morning of May 21, 1944, a sudden accident claimed the lives of more than 160 soldiers, sailors, and civilians. A spark ignited pallets of mortars, ammunition, and thousands of gallons of gasoline, destroying six ships at the West Loch Naval facility in Pearl Harbor. Men were hurled hundreds of feet into the air, buildings were flattened, and vehicles were overturned. The heat was so intense that firefighters had to wait 24 hours before they could begin bringing the massive fire and smoke under control. Many victims were never recovered.

The Community

The sisterhood of the Women's Federation for World Peace Hawai'i Chapter was invited to attend this little-known yet sacred event, even within veteran circles, through the American Veterans Ladies Auxiliary Hawaii Post 0001. Mrs. Doris Edwards, Executive Director of the Ladies AMVETS Auxiliary, had recently returned from her second pilgrimage to Korea in solidarity with Hak Ja Han and was invited to speak at the 16th Anniversary Celebration of Life honoring those lost in the West Loch Disaster.

A Hidden Date in History

This tragic event is often overshadowed by more widely recognized veteran observances. Yet on May 21, 1944, at approximately 3:08 p.m., more than 160 families were forever changed.

During Memorial Day weekend, the nation pays tribute to the Fallen and to Gold Star families. Just last week, on May 17, a National Day of Prayer was held to rededicate America as "One Nation Under God." In that same spirit of remembrance and action, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency identified and returned the remains of two soldiers lost in this tragedy, and for the 16th time, the community gathered to honor the fallen of West Loch.

The Healing Circle of Community

On Thursday, May 21, 2026, a circle of healers gathered at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, known as the "Punchbowl," under the sponsorship of the Obama Hawaiian Africana Museum.

WFWP Hawai'i, New Life Body of Christ, the Ladies AMVETS Auxiliary, the Hawaiian Joint Military Forces, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, Naval Munitions Command, the American Legion, and many families came together in a shared celebration of life. The ceremony featured prayers, the presentation of the National Colors by the Joint Color Guard of the Pacific, Taps and a 21-gun salute by the U.S. Marines, musical tributes by the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Hawai'i, and libation ceremonies honoring the souls of the deceased.

Our sisterhood chapter, together with the Ladies Auxiliary, also prepared a beautiful Wreath of Remembrance for the ceremony's culminating moment: the laying of the wreaths.