

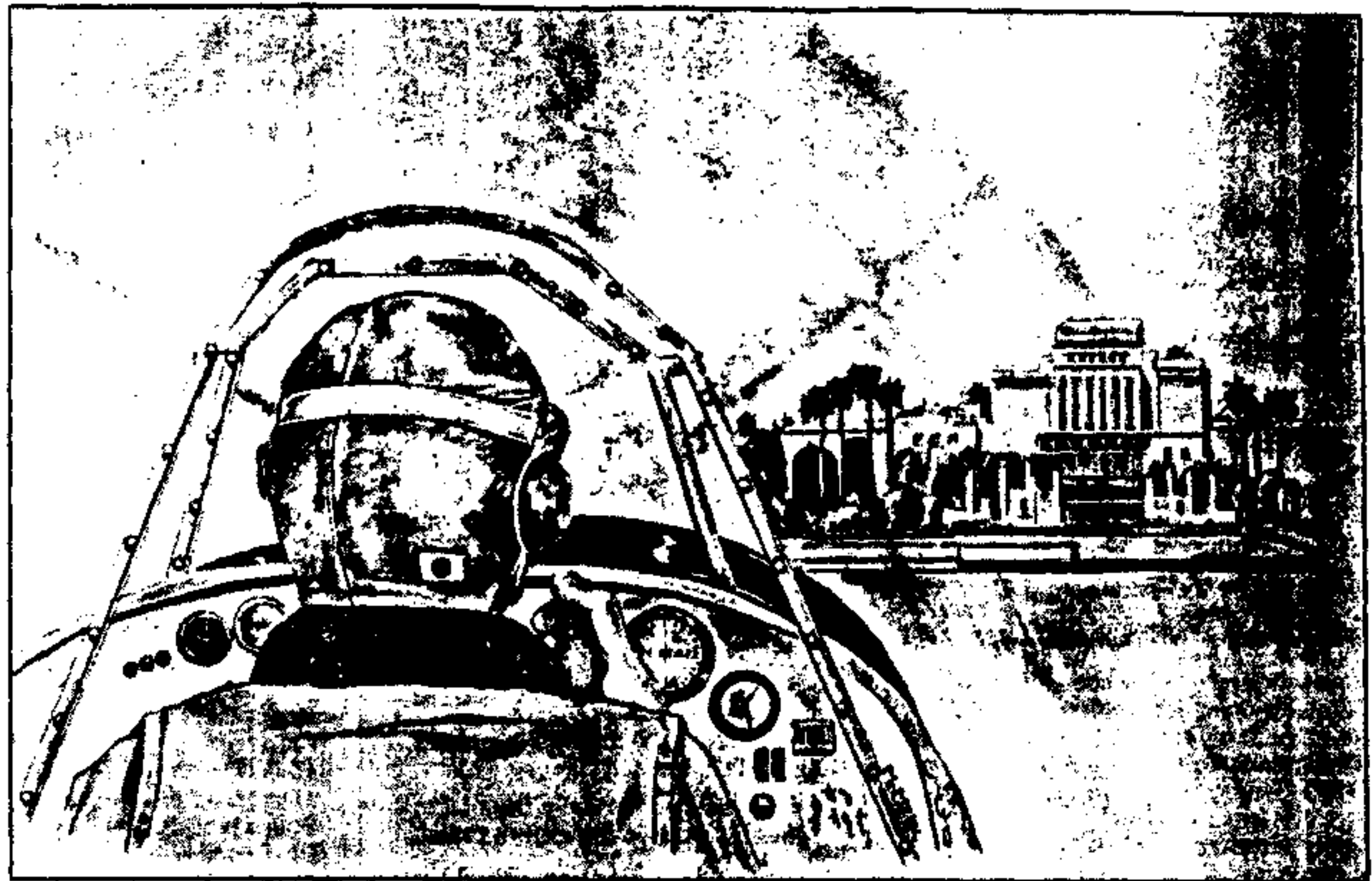
NOTE: The article from The Latter-Day Sentinel, May 17, 1989, is included because of the relevance of the information to the two papers presented by Lance Chase and Ken Baldrige.

## EXPLODING AN LDS MYTH

By Mark Augustine



**Ken Baldrige:**  
'Not as adamant'



Latter-Day Sentinel Illustration - Mitch Meek

**'I've never talked to anybody who has met the man'**

Kenneth Baldrige is always a little bit nervous that, someday, a Japanese man is going to tap him on the shoulder and say, "Excuse me, I tried to bomb the Hawaiian Temple in World War II. I hear you're looking for me."

You see, Brother Baldrige, a history professor at BYU-Hawaii, has spent the better part of 20 years trying to prove such a man doesn't exist.

It hasn't been easy.

The story of the attempted bombing of the temple during the raid on Pearl Harbor has reached mythological proportions among LDS.

Several variations of this particular Mormon myth have made the rounds, some of them fairly credible, others utterly ludicrous.

Basically the rumor is that a Japanese pilot split off from the attack ranks at Pearl Harbor to drop a bomb on the temple about six miles from the site of the attack.

The pilot, however, was unable to hit the temple--the reason varies with the story. And because of his experience, he later joined the Church.

So now the big question: Is it true, or what?

Brother Baldrige insists it's unlikely such an attempt ever took place. He even researched the issue and prepared a 21-page document in 1978 concluding the tale should be considered no more than mere folklore.

Over the years, he's interviewed scores of Japanese and Hawaiians searching for someone, anyone, who could give a first-hand account or who knew the pilot personally.

Says Brother Baldrige: "I've never talked to anybody who has met the man."

His skepticism is also based on his study of the Pearl Harbor attack, which has led him to conclude the odds against an attempted attack on the temple are "staggering," for a number of reasons:

- oThe pilot wouldn't risk ruining the secret attack by bombing the temple before the rest of the pilots reached " Battleship Row," the primary target. Logistically speaking, an attempt on the temple would have taken place about 15 minutes before the actual Pearl Harbor attack.

- oNo pilot would fly off away from the rest of the bombers on his own unauthorized mission.

- oThe Japanese planes attacked only military targets.

But even Brother Baldrige can't dismiss the story entirely.

Two active, faithful LDS men have added their reasonably credible testimonies to the ever-growing rumor.

The first is a native of Laie, Hawaii, who says on the morning of the attack, he was outside recovering from a drinking binge (he was less active in those days) when he spied the plane diving at the temple, unable to release its bombs.

There are some gaps in the story, however:

- oIn an earlier version, he said he was fishing, not recovering in his back yard.

- oLDS families who lived literally a stone's throw from the temple say they heard or saw no airplanes that morning.

The second and most credible testimony comes from a prominent Church leader who served a mission to Japan in the 1950s.

This leader is reluctant to say anything at all about it and has asked not to be identified because of a promise he made to the Japanese Saints never to embarrass them by telling a story that to many is sacred.

As a missionary, however, he recorded in his journal how he happened to show a non-LDS Japanese man a photograph of the Hawaiian Temple.

According to his journal, the man grew pale and said he had tried to bomb it.

Against the leader's wishes, the story has spread, and could well be the origin of the myth.

However, there's a problem: A roster of the pilots who took part in the raid doesn't include the name of the man the missionary talked to--or anything like it.

But as BYU historian and author Richard Cowan point out, that roster could have been incomplete, and the story could well be accurate.

But Brother Cowan still won't include the story in an upcoming history of LDS temples he's getting ready to publish.

"I hope it's true," he says. "But I've heard other 'faith-promoting' stories that turn out to be somebody's good imagination."

One thing is fairly certain: The pilot--if there ever was one--has never joined the Church, despite false rumors that he later became a Hawaiian Temple worker.

Even the missionary who supposedly met the pilot recorded that he was a non-LDS who wanted nothing to do with the Church.

That missionary later returned to Japan to find the pilot, but discovered he had died in the early 70s of tuberculosis.

There was one Pearl Harbor pilot, Commander Mitsuo Fuchida, who later converted to Christianity--but not to the Church--and became a traveling evangelist, giving a lecture titled, "From Pearl Harbor to Calvary."

That, Brother Baldrige believes, is the basis for the rumor.

But he won't swear to it. After all, he still may get that tap on the shoulder.

"I'll have to confess, (the missionary's) story gives me pause," he says. "I'm not quite as adamant as I once was."

#### VERSIONS OF BOMBING STORY DIFFER DRASTICALLY

There are countless variations to the rumor of the Hawaiian Temple bombing, with LDS mixing and matching the various elements as they perpetuate one of the more famous Mormon Myths.

Here are the versions we're aware of

oThe lost pilot version: The bomber somehow got split up from the rest of the pack, spied the temple and decided to destroy it.

oThe planned mission version: The pilot didn't get lost, he had planned it all along and even took practice flights over the temple before the war.

oThe impromptu attack version: It wasn't planned, and he wasn't lost. He just saw the bright temple over there and decided to leave the pack for a

moment to bomb it.

o**The force-field version:** The bomber couldn't hit the temple because some mysterious force wouldn't allow him to fly over it.

o**The faulty bomb bay version:** The bomber was able to fly over the temple all right, he just couldn't release the bombs for mechanical reasons until he was safely over the ocean.

o**The drowsy pilot version:** He could fly over the temple and the bomb bay was working, but the pilot grew dizzy and "blacked out" before he could drop the bomb.

o**The protective cloud version:** Everything worked and the pilot was fine, but he couldn't find the temple because of a mist or cloud.

The second half of the story is that the pilot supposedly joined the Church years later, and there are variations to this half as well.

Some say he knew nothing of the temple until, years later, missionaries contacted him in Japan.

Others insist he made a vow, after failing to bomb the temple, to find out what sort of building could have that sort of divine protection.