

Previously published in The Oyster Bay Historical Society's *The Freeholder*
Revised and modified in July 2010 for website publication at www.spinzialongislandstates.com
Please cite as: Spinzia, Raymond E. "Those Other Roosevelts: The Fortescues" *The Freeholder* 11 (Summer 2006):
8-9, 16-22.

Those Other Roosevelts: The Fortescues

by Raymond E. Spinzia

•

Kenyon, Granville, and Maude Fortescue were the illegitimate children of Robert Barnwell Roosevelt, Sr. (1829-1906) and an Irish immigrant named Marion Theresa O'Shea.

Roosevelt initially established his satellite family in a Manhattan brownstone on the same street as his primary family's residence, listing himself in the New York City Directory as a fictitious lawyer named Robert F. Fortescue with Marion (1849-1902) as his wife.¹ He would later relocate the Fortescues to Long Island, near his Bayport *Lotos Lake* estate, which he occupied with his Roosevelt family.²

Of the three Fortescue children to reach adulthood Kenyon and Maude appear to have led relatively sedate lives.³ In 1900 Maude (1880-1961) married Ernest William Sutton Pickhardt and resided in London, England. Kenyon (1870-1939), a Sayville resident and a partner in the Manhattan law firm of Roosevelt and Kobbe, remained a bachelor.⁴

Their brother Granville (1875-1952), was the anomaly in the "Fortescue branch" of the family. The only Roosevelt to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery, Granville developed the same fascination for adventure as did his first cousin President Theodore Roosevelt. In 1898 Granville left the University of Pennsylvania to enlist as a private in Teddy's Rough Riders, eventually rising to the rank of corporal in its First United States Volunteer Cavalry.⁵ As a First Lieutenant in the Twenty-Sixth Volunteer Infantry, Granville served in The Philippines during the 1899-1901 insurrection. As a Second Lieutenant in the regular army's Fourth Cavalry, he graduated from the Army General Service and Staff College in 1904. Later that year, as a First Lieutenant in the Tenth United States Cavalry, he was appointed by Theodore Roosevelt as a White House military aide. As such, he was posted as a military observer to Japan just prior to the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. With the cessation of hostilities, Granville returned to the United States and, in 1906, resigned from the army.

That same year he accepted a commission as captain and special agent in the Cuban Rural Guard, resigning in 1909 to cover the Spanish Army at Malilla during the Riff Uprising in Spanish Morocco (July-October, 1909) as a war correspondent for the *London Standard*.⁶

While Teddy was exploring the River of Doubt in Brazil in 1914, Granville took part in the exploration of the Orinoco River in Venezuela from its headwaters to its mouth.

With the outbreak of World War I Granville returned to journalism as a war correspondent for the *London Daily Telegraph*, reporting on the Belgian, French, English, Russian, and Turkish fronts. When the United States entered the war in 1917, he served as a major in the 314th Field Artillery of the American Expeditionary Force in France. Granville was gassed during the German attack at Mountfaucou but remained in the army until 1928, retiring with the rank of major.⁷



*Granville Fortescue
at the Russian Front, 1915*



Granville with his daughters

At first the private life of Granville Roland Fortescue seemed to be as promising as his professional life. In 1910 he married Grace Hubbard Bell (1883-1979), a niece of the inventor Alexander Graham Bell and an heir to the Bell Telephone Company fortune. She was the daughter of Charles John and Roberta Wolcott Hubbard Bell, who resided on Connecticut Avenue in Washington, DC, and at *Twin Oaks*, the Hubbard-Bell, eighteen-acre estate on the outskirts of the capitol.⁸

Outwardly, the Fortescues appeared to be wealthy country gentry. In reality, financial affairs became a primary concern for them after Granville's final retirement from the army. With the exception of a short stint as a fiction editor for *Liberty Magazine* in 1930, he steadfastly refused to engage in any form of steady employment, preferring instead to wait for the substantial fortune his wife would inherit at the death of her parents.⁹

Insulated in private schools paid for by family members, the Fortescue daughters Grace, known as Thalia (1911-1963); Marion, known as Rion (1912-1983); and Kenyon, known as Helene (1914-1990), appear to have been oblivious to their parents' constant bickering over financial matters and their frequent separations.¹⁰ Lacking proper parental supervision and a stable home environment, two of the Fortescue girls went from being rowdy adolescent pranksters to being adults beset with serious legal and, ultimately, life-threatening emotional problems.¹¹ What began as relatively harmless pranks such as taunting the Bayport boys by swimming nude in the lake on their parents' estate, *Wildholme*; parading nude around the estate in front of its middle-aged gatekeeper; Helene's fraudulent 1934 wedding ceremony in Carmel, NY; and her theft of a Valley Stream resident's truck in 1936, escalated into dangerous behavior with Helene threatening her husband Julian Louis Reynolds with an automatic pistol; the kidnapping of a baby from the lobby of the Patchogue movie theater by Thalia and her future husband Thomas Hedges Massie; and ultimately into one of the most notorious murder trials of the 1930s.¹²

Massie (1905-1987), the son of a Winchester, Kentucky, shoe store proprietor, was educated in a public elementary school and, subsequently, in private military secondary schools prior to his acceptance into the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis. During his senior year at the academy he met Thalia and after his graduation in 1927, they married at the Bethlehem Chapel of the National Cathedral in Washington, DC.

Their marriage was stormy from the beginning. His "hard-drinking" bride of sixteen found it difficult to adjust to the social obligations of a naval officer's wife. Even Massie's transfer to Pearl Harbor in exotic Hawaii, in the spring of 1930, did little to quell their troubled marriage. As Thalia's drinking and extra-marital affairs increased, their arguments grew louder and more frequent. Thalia's habits of prancing around their backyard partially clothed and insulting Massie's fellow officers and their wives at parties became an embarrassment to Massie and a hindrance to his navel career, inducing him to threaten Thalia with divorce.



The Massies at their wedding, 1927

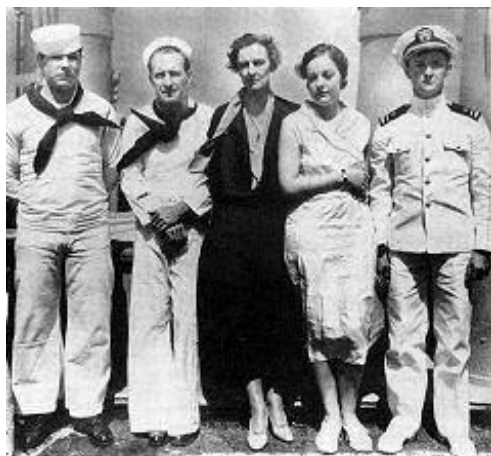
This unbearable situation evolved into a "nightmare" on the evening of September 12, 1931. Thalia, as she had done so often, overindulged at an officers' party at the Ala Wai Inn, insulted virtually everyone at the party, and left without her husband. When Massie arrived home, he found

Hawaii as a “melting pot peril.” As tensions escalated, the legislature of Massie’s native state of Kentucky adopted a resolution asking President Hoover to use his powers as Commander-in-Chief to demand the conviction of the alleged assailants and the immediate release of Massie, Mrs. Fortescue, Lord, and Jones. If the Hawaiian courts and territorial government refused, the resolution further called on President Hoover to “declare marshal law in Honolulu until such time as Hawaii can be made safe for women and especially the wives of our men in the army and navy....”¹⁵ Ever mindful of political expediency, Congressmen joined the call to put Hawaii under marshal law.

Fearing the possibility of race riots in the Territory, President Hoover held a special cabinet meeting in the White House to discuss possible actions. The Hawaiian National Guard was put on alert for possible mobilization; machine guns were mounted on Honolulu police cars. Shore leave for military personnel serving in Hawaii was restricted; naval maneuvers that were to be conducted in Hawaiian waters were canceled.

In this atmosphere of hatred and distrust the jury rendered its verdict. Darrow and the defendants, who were confident of an acquittal, were stunned by the verdict of guilty — guilty of manslaughter with a recommendation for leniency. The jury was obviously unaware that the reduced charge of manslaughter carried a mandatory sentence of ten years at hard labor.

The press, Congress, and Department of the Navy were incensed. One hundred members of Congress signed a petition to Hawaii’s Territorial Governor Judd demanding that he pardon the defendants or face the end of Hawaiian self rule. The navy threatened to boycott and cancel its contracts with any firm that employed members of the jury. After four days of intense pressure from Washington and the national press, Judd commuted the sentence to one hour, to be served in his office at Lolani Palace, in the custody of the High Sheriff.



*The Four Murder Defendants,
along with Thalia (second from right) on board USS Alton*

In the wake of the “Massie Affair” the four surviving alleged attackers of Mrs. Massie were never retried and spent the remainder of their lives in Hawaii. After the commutation of their sentence, the enlisted men Lord and Jones remained in the navy, both rising to the rank of Chief Petty Officer.

Grace, who continued to be plagued by emotional problems and alcoholism, was never able to embody the spirit of her nickname Thalia, the Greek Muse of comedy and bucolic poetry; one of Greek mythology’s Graces. On February 23, 1934, the Massies were granted a divorce in the Reno District Court. That very evening in a Reno nightclub, Thalia, who opposed the idea of a divorce, attempted suicide by drinking poison.¹⁶ Six weeks later, still despondent over the unwanted divorce, Thalia, slashed both her wrists in an another abortive suicide attempt while cruising the Mediterranean aboard the Italian liner *SS Roma*. After recuperating in a Genovese clinic for less than a month, she returned to the United States.

Adrift, restless, and depressed, Thalia moved around the country, appearing in court sporadically for drunkenness, disorderly conduct, and assault and battery. One of these incidents occurred in 1950 when Thalia, a part-time student at Los Angeles City College, was arrested for beating her pregnant landlady. Thalia subsequently enrolled in the University of Arizona where, at the age of forty-two, she met and married Robert Uptigrove, a twenty-one-year-old fellow student. After their divorce in 1955, she relocated to a Palm Beach apartment not far from her mother’s Florida home.¹⁷ On July 2, 1963, Thalia finally succeeded in committing suicide by taking an overdose of barbiturates in her apartment.

Massie, like his wife Thalia, was plagued by crises after their divorce. In March 1937 he married Florence Storms of Chewallah, WA. In 1938 Florence became the center of an international incident while in Japanese-occupied Tsingtao, China. A Japanese sentry, incensed that Florence didn’t obey his commands and unaware that she neither spoke nor understood Japanese, slapped her across the face. The matter was resolved when representatives from the Japanese naval department expressed regret for the incident and assured the United States Consul in China that the sentry would be punished.¹⁸

Years of emotional upheaval finally caught up with Massie. In 1940, while serving aboard the USS *Texas*, he began to exhibit bizarre and unsettling behavior. He appeared disheveled while on duty; his behavior became irrational and erratic punctuated with violence. He displayed illusions of grandeur, hallucinations, and incoherent speech. His mental health had also disintegrated into believing that he was under the direction of supernatural forces to the point of carrying an empty bottle which he believed could be filled with powerful liquids that could give him untold abilities.

On July 9, 1940, after treatment at Norfolk Naval Hospital in Portsmouth, VA, and at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital in Washington, DC, Massie was discharged from the navy with a medical disability. He relocated to San Diego and supplemented his disability pension working alternately as a real

estate agent and as an employee of General Dynamics, Convair, and other defense manufacturers. Massie died on January 8, 1987, the fifty-fifth anniversary of Joseph Kahahawai, Jr's murder.¹⁹

Just prior to Thalia's suicide attempt aboard the SS *Roma*, her mother inherited her portion of the Bell fortune and purchased a home in the Bahamas, naming it *Stonehaven*. She and Granville later relocated to Palm Beach, FL, where they built *Isle Home*, their house on Lake Worth, furnishing it rather insensitively in a Hawaiian motif. The Fortescues continued to spend their summers at *Wildholme* in Bayport until Granville, who was still unemployed, died in 1952. Mrs. Fortescue subsequently spent most of her time in Palm Beach, taking up water-skiing at the age of seventy-five and parasailing at age eighty-seven. She died in 1979 at the age of ninety-five never showing any remorse for her part in the "Massie Affair."

Helene, whose only part in the "Massie Affair" was the disposal of the murder weapon, was, like her sister Thalia, an alcoholic suffering from emotional problems. In 1936 Helene married Julian Louis Reynolds, an heir to the Reynolds aluminum and tobacco fortunes. Her marriage, like that of her sister Thalia, was stormy from the beginning. The Reynoldses' divorce in 1938 was precipitated by Helene's excessive drinking, emotional disorders, and her burning desire to become an actress. In spite of her problems, Helene managed to have a career as an actress, primarily in "B" grade motion pictures, and, in the 1960s, as a Manhattan art gallery proprietor and artist.²⁰ As she was trying to adjust to the fact that her acting career had seen its day and still plagued by her life-long problems, for which she sought treatment at Bellevue Hospital on several occasions, Helene had to withstand still another blow to her already fragile life. In 1966, just three years after the suicide of her sister Thalia, Helene's twenty-nine-year-old son Richard Roland Reynolds accidentally walked into the moving propeller of a plane which he was inspecting for possible purchase.²¹ Helene would eventually succumb to cancer at the age of seventy-six in 1990 while residing in Lake Worth, FL.

Ironically the murder trial could have been averted if Massie had accepted the advice of Thalia's physician Lieutenant Commander John Porter. After the alleged attack, Porter examined Thalia and counseled Massie to drop the criminal charges against the alleged assailants. He even offered to use his influence to have Massie transferred to an out-of-the-way post where no one had heard of them.

Actually, the entire "Massie Affair" need not have occurred had the Honolulu police conducted a proper investigation of Thalia's claims instead of rushing to arrest the five alleged assailants. Overlooked, or perhaps ignored, by the police were two important inconsistencies. Thalia claimed that she had been dragged through the woods and raped multiple times, yet the dress and shoes she was wearing that evening showed no signs of tears or stains. Perhaps even more damning of the police

investigation was the fact that a medical examination of the alleged attackers showed no recent sexual activity by any of the men.

After the commutation of the sentences imposed on Mrs. Fortescue, Massie, Lord, and Jones, the territorial legislature commissioned the Pinkerton National Detective Agency to investigate all aspects of the “Massie Affair.” The agency’s three-month investigation culminated in a three-hundred-page report which stated that the alleged attackers “had no opportunity to commit the kidnapping and the rape... We have found nothing in the record of the case, nor have we through our own efforts been able to find what in our estimation would be sufficient corroboration of the statements of Mrs. Massie to establish the occurrence of rape upon her.”²²

•

ENDNOTES

1. Both the Robert Barnwell Roosevelt, Sr. and Fortescue residences were located on 20th Street in Manhattan.

Marion was not Robert’s only mistress. A noted ladies’ man, he reputedly purchased garish green gloves at a sale in A. T. Stewart’s Department Store, and distributed them to his paramours. For years his friends amused themselves, while strolling down Fifth Avenue or riding in Central Park, by looking to see who was wearing “the green gloves.” David McCullough, *Mornings on Horseback* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2001), p. 22.

2. Robert Barnwell Roosevelt, Sr.’s first wife was Elizabeth Thorn Ellis (1830-1887), with whom he fathered Margaret (1851-1929), John Ellis (1853-1939), and Robert Jr. (1866-1929). Marion Theresa O’Shea became Robert Barnwell Roosevelt, Sr.’s second wife in 1888 with their marriage in a Roman Catholic Church in Clapham, England.

For a comprehensive history of Long Island’s South Shore estates *see* Havemeyer, Harry W. *Along the Great South Bay from Oakdale to Babylon, the Story of a Summer Spa, 1840 to 1940*. Mattituck, NY: Amereon House, 1996; Havemeyer, Harry W. *East on the Great South Bay: Sayville and Bellport 1860-1960*. Mattituck, NY: Amereon House, 2001; and Spinzia, Raymond E. and Judith A. *Long Island’s Prominent South Shore Families: Their Estates and Their Country Homes in the Towns of Babylon and Islip*. College Station, TX: Virtualbookworm, 2006.

3. Robert Barnwell Roosevelt, Sr. and Marion Theresa O’Shea’s fourth child was a daughter. Harry W. Havemeyer, *East on the Great South Bay: Sayville and Bellport 1860-1960*. (Mattituck, NY: Amereon House, 2001), p. 44.

4. Maude and Ernest William Sutton Pickhardt were divorced at the time of his suicide in 1909. Pickhardt was the son of Manhattan millionaire Ernest Wilhelm Pickhardt who had made his fortune in the dye industry. Ernest’s sister was Baroness Irene von Colberg. *The New York Times* July 8, 1909, p. 4. In 1945 Maude married Brigadier General Richard L. A. Pennington.

5. Granville had previously been expelled from Yale for firing a gun next to the head of a sleeping fraternity brother. He subsequently entered the University of Pennsylvania. When rejected for the university's football team, he assaulted the coach, causing him to be hospitalized for three days. University officials later reversed the coach's decision and placed Granville on the team. David E. Stannard, *Honor Killing: How the Infamous "Massie Affair" Transformed Hawaii* (New York: Viking, 2005), pp. 8-9.

6. During the Riff Uprisings Fortescue actively participated in military actions and gave tactical advice to Spanish officers while under fire from the Arabs. Granville Fortescue, *Front Line and Deadline: The Experiences of a War Correspondent* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1937), pp. 9-24.

7. Wounded in the foot at the battle of San Juan Hill and gassed at Mountfaucon, Granville was the recipient of the Purple Heart, Certificate of Merit and Distinguished Service Award, Victory Medal, Spanish War Medal, Philippine Insurrection War Medal, Order of the Rising Sun, and the Japanese War Medal.

8. Born in Dublin, Ireland, Charles John Bell (1858-1929) was a cousin of Alexander Graham Bell. Settling in Washington, DC, Charles established the private banking firm of Bell & Company, ultimately becoming the chairman of the board, president, or a director of over a dozen corporations and a founder of the American Red Cross. In 1881 he married Roberta Wolcott Hubbard, the daughter of Gardiner Greene Hubbard of Boston, MA, and *Twin Oaks*. [Hubbard was the first president of the Bell Telephone Company and a founder of the National Geographic Society.] Charles and Roberta had two children: Helen Adine married Julien Ashton Ripley, Sr. and resided at *Three Corner Farm* on Ripley Lane in Muttontown and Grace Hubbard Bell, who married Granville Roland Fortescue. After Roberta's death in 1885, Charles married her sister Grace Blatchford Hubbard in 1887. Charles and Grace had three children: Gardiner Hubbard, Charles James, and Robert Wolcott Bell. *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* vol. 21, pp. 33-34.

The Hubbard-Bell estate *Twin Oaks*, located on Woodley Road in Washington, DC, became the Embassy of The Republic of China.

9. Because of Granville's steadfast refusal to obtain steady employment, his wife was compelled to charge friends for bridge lessons. The wife of the gardener at *Twin Oaks* referred to Granville as "dissolute, lazy, and a heavy drinker." The wife of the gatekeeper at the Fortescues' Bayport estate *Wildholme* claimed that the Fortescues "lived like low class foreigners" when there were no guests at the estate. Stannard, p. 14.

Fortescue had inherited the Roosevelt *Lotos Lake* estate and renamed it *Wildholme*.

In 1953 vandals entered the main house and destroyed virtually every piece of the Fortescues' furniture, china, and paintings, while doing extensive damage to the structure of the house. For a detailed account of the vandalism see Havemeyer, *East on the Great South Bay*, pp. 258-60. In 1958 the main house was destroyed by fire.

10. Granville had at least one documented extra-marital affair. In 1905 he, along with two other men, was named as corespondent in the sordid trial of Chicago heiress Mrs. Grace Culver Taggard. Grace claimed that her husband Army Captain Elmore Taggard, who was suing her for divorce and custody of their two children on the grounds of infidelity, was suffering from the effects of alcohol and the tropical climate of The Phillippines. Using her considerable family influence Grace had her husband incarcerated in an army mental ward. The ensuing seven-week court proceedings culminated in a divorce in the captain's favor. In rendering his decision the judge severely rebuked Fortescue and

Grace's other lovers, blaming them for her immoral behavior and calling on society to treat the correspondents as "social outcasts." Stannard, p. 10.

11. After studying at Oxford in England, the Fortescue's third daughter Marion, married Daulton Gillespie Viskniskki, the son of journalist Guy Thomas Viskniskki of Montclair, NJ. After their marriage, Daulton and Marion resided in Cambridge, MA, in the 1950s and were residing in Indianapolis, IN, in 1960. In 1961 their daughter Vikki married James C. Huff, the son of Clarence R. Huff of Canterbury, OH.

12. The Fortescue children may well have inherited their propensity for rowdy behavior from their parents, although it is certainly questionable that Granville's college incidents could be classified as youthful pranks. Their mother Grace could definitely be classified as a prankster. As a youth she and her friends took a joy ride through the streets of the capitol on a Washington "trolley car" which they had stolen. On another occasion Grace blocked traffic on Washington's Pennsylvania Avenue by joining hands with her friends and roller skating down the avenue. *The New York Times* August 3, 1938, p. 14.

13. In reality, of the five alleged attackers, two were native Hawaiian, two were Japanese, and one was Chinese-Hawaiian.

14. During the ten-mile, high-speed car chase police fired three shots at the car knocking out its rear tail light. The pursuit came to an end when Mrs. Fortescue was finally forced off the road by the police.

15. *The New York Times* January 19, 1932, p. 3.

After the conviction, Kentucky's Governor Laffoon restored Massie's rights of citizenship within the state. *The New York Times* June 1, 1932, p. 1.

The publisher of the *New York Daily News*, Joseph Medill Patterson, was Granville's friend from his prewar days as a European correspondent. Stannard, p. 299.

16. Patrons at the Reno nightclub testified that Thalia had taken poison yet her physician Dr. Vinton A. Muller denied the veracity of the police report of attempted suicide. *The New York Times* February 24, 1934, p. 30.

17. Thalia's second husband Robert Uptigrove died in 1958 at the age of twenty-six.

18. *The New York Times* July 31, 1938, p. 26.

19. Stannard, pp. 406-7.

20. In later life Helene Fortescue Reynolds was the proprietor of Kenyon's Painting Pad located in the Volney Hotel at 23 East 74th Street in Manhattan. As an artist Helene signed her own paintings as Kenyon, Charles Adams, Herbert Foust, and Marie Hetherington. *The New York Times* November 13, 1968, p. 4.

21. *The New York Times* October 13, 1966, p. 45.

22. Stannard, pp. 396-99.

23. For a detailed account of the “Massie Affair” see Black, Cobey. *Hawaii Scandal*. Waipaku, HI: Island Heritage, 2002; Stannard, David E. *Honor Killing: How the Infamous “Massie Affair” Transformed Hawaii*. New York: Viking, 2005; Van Slingerland, Peter. *Something Terrible Has Happened*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966; Wright, Theon. *Rape In Paradise*. New York; Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1966.

Helene Fortescue Reynolds (born Kenyon Fortescue) used the stage aliases of Helene Reynolds, Helene Whitney, and Joyce Gardner as an actress. The following list details her filmography, including her television appearances.

Motion Picture Films as Helene Reynolds:

- 1941 – *Confirm or Deny* (Dorothy)
- 1941 – *Blue, White, and Perfect* (Helen Shaw)
- 1942 – *Girl Trouble* (Helen Martin)
- 1942 – *Roxie Hart* (Velma Wall)
- 1942 – *Tales of Manhattan* (actress)
- 1942 – *Moontide* (woman on boat)
- 1942 – *The Man Who Wouldn't Die* (Anne Wolff)
(originally titled *No Coffin for the Corpse*)
- 1943 – *Dixie Dugan* (Jean Patterson)
- 1943 – *Heaven Can Wait* (showgirl Peggy Nash)
- 1943 – *Wintertime* (uncredited – Marian Daly)
- 1943 – *The Meanest Man in the World* (wife)
- 1944 – *Bermuda Mystery* (Angela)

Television appearances as Helene Reynolds:

- 1945 – “The Front Page” (Mollie Malloy)
- October 1948 – “Mirage in Manhattan” on The Chevrolet Tele-Theatre

Motion Picture Films as Helene Whitney:

- 1939 – *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Fleur DeLys)
- 1940 – *The Philadelphia Story* (society woman)
- 1940 – *The Saint's Double Trouble* (Ann Bitts)
- 1940 – *Millionaire Playboy* (uncredited)
- 1941 – *City of Missing Girls* (Katherine Crawford)

Motion Picture Films as Joyce Gardner:

- 1939 – George O'Brien western, directed by David Howard for RKO
[unable to determine title]

photo credits: *Granville Fortescue: Front Line and Dead Line*, 2 top
Honolulu Police Department, 4 bottom
Library of Congress, 2 bottom, 4 top, 5
Wide World Photos, 3

© Copyright 2006 by Raymond E. Spinzia