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I went to Omaha with friend at 17. We had talked to the recruiters in Sioux Falls, They sent us to Omaha for final tests. It was 1941 Feb. 12, my 17th birthday.

You were so young.

Your folks had to sign for you. My dad signed for me. He told me later, 'I didn't think you'd go.'

When you signed up at 17, did you have any idea you'd have to do what you did?

No, nobody did. Back in those days you went into the navy because there wasn't anything around here. You could go out and work on the farm for a couple bucks a day and that was about it. If you couldn't afford to go to college, there wasn't anything for you back then. And in those days, there were very few of those kids that went to college because there weren't many that could afford it. And I got a chance to go into navy and I said I would do it.

I went back in after the war and after I got married I stayed until I served 20 years.

What did you think it would be like?

Like they advertise, "Join the navy, and see the world." And that's what we did. I did, I seen a lot of it.

We went to boot camp in the Great Lakes. When we got out of there, we were sent out of there and went to Long Beach. And in Long Beach we got our orders for our first duty station. And I was assigned to the USS Vestal. It was a repair ship, and stationed in Pearl Harbor. We took an old oil tanker from Long Beach to Pearl Harbor.see they even furnish transportation.

And after you got to Pearl Harbor -

We got out there and I went right aboard the Vestal. It was beautiful. The weather was nice. We had the liberty of going into Honolulu, Waikiki, swam in Waikiki beach. All of the places they talk about vacationing today, we didn't have all those places at that time. There was two main hotels.and now that area is one big hotel after the other. We had that all to ourselves, we could go swimming Waikiki beach, and travel around the island and see the pineapple fields and see the different sights. It was all like the navy said. Join the navy and see the world.

It was about June that we arrived out there. And all of these good times lasted until Dec. 7. We had been ordered to go alongside the Arizona and do some repairs on it. We went along side her on Saturday and tied up to her and we were sitting there Sunday morning when the Japanese attacked, and then all the good times ended and things got a little serious, and for a 17 year old boy, why, you grew up real fast.

The Attack

We got hit twice while we were alongside the Arizona, probably bombs that were meant for the Arizona. We got one that hit us up forward and exploded in one of the storerooms, we fought fires up there for most of the day and one in the back half and went all the way out the bottom. Glass from the Arizona had blown several people over the side including our captain. He swam back to the ship, come aboard the gangway, in the mean time, the executive officer had been hollering to abandon ship. He was going to abandon ship and we were going to go down along with the Arizona. But our captain, when came back aboard. He said 'abandon ship, hell, he says, we're getting underway. We got underway and run her across channel. We wound up on mud flats. We sat there for the rest of the attack. Once we got there the Japanese ignored us the rest of the attack, because they knew we weren't a combat ship you could look at us and tell that. We were an old ship that was built in 1904.

They took one look and knew we couldn't do them any damage, so they were still working on the combat ships in the harbor. We could see quite a bit from where we were at, but at the same time, there was so much smoke over Pearl Harbor that you couldn't see everything that was going on. We knew sitting there that every battle ship in there was either rolled over or bottom side up, sitting on the bottom.

The Arizona had literally blown apart as we was pulling away from her. They had a bomb that hit and got down into the magazines where all the munitions and powder for their big guns were. And that literally blew her apart. And sent her down to the bottom.

Once we got to the mud flats, they left us alone. We could look over. The Oklahoma was sitting bottom side up, and the California and Maryland. They was both setting on the bottom. The Nevada got underway, and was trying to get out to sea. She took a torpedo and a bomb, just before she got out of the harbor. They ordered her to run aground on the side on the channel. So she wouldn't block the channel. Because if they had sunk her in the channel, well they would have everything blocked in. but they kept her from blocking the channel. The Pennsylvania was in dry dock.

It got to be a pretty long day. We sat over there. We couldn't do anything. We didn't have any guns. We couldn't shoot. We did send part of our repair force to help some. like the Oklahoma was laying there upside down. Some of our repair force units went over there. They cut holes in her trying to get people out. They knew there was people down in there. They could hear them hammering on the bulkheads and that. They managed to get some of the people out. But they had to quit because they were afraid of fire the oil in there with the cutting torches and that, they were afraid, if anyone was trapped in there they just had to stay there. They had brought some midget subs, the Japanese, they had planned on getting them in there when they came, they got one in the harbor.

This whole thing was a confused mess. Because in Washington,, we were negotiating with the Japanese. That Japanese task force laid 200 miles off Hawaii. It was either 200 or 260 miles they laid off it and launched their planes. The first wave was 180 planes and they had die bombers, torpedo planes, fighters, high-level bombers. As soon as they got to the point where they had to go back because they were running out of fuel, they launched their another wave with about as many planes. They had the same thing, fighters, bombers, torpedo planes, they come in supposedly to clean up, but they couldn't see much there was so much smoke, but they were just dropping bombs at random. When they got out of there. There was all kinds of rumor that Japanese were landing all parts of the islands. But they didn't .if they had, we would probably still be fighting there. For some reason they never brought troops to put on the island.

All of our fuel tanks where we stored they never touched them.

For some reason they never touched the fuel tanks in the hillside or brought troops.

We managed to make it through the day, and the night. That night every very time you turn around there were rumors, and any plane we managed to get in the air, coming in after dark everyone thought it was always a Japanese plane, all night long it was pretty hectic. When the daylight came the smoke cleared,

we were able to see the devastation of all the ships. It was hard to believe that battleships that were unsinkable were all sitting on the bottom.

What did Pearl Harbor look like at dawn the next morning?

An awful mess. Ships that were on the bottom, ships still on fire, burning. Oil on the water, oil all over the place. The old Oklahoma that was on the opposite side of the island.

The old Utah was tied over opposite side from where we was at. She had been the first ship in the harbor that was hit, she was the only ship that didn't have a gun on her. She was used to tow targets, they sunk her. She was rolled over, some people got off, but there were 58 people on board. and the ashes of a baby girl.

One of the men aboard the Utah, he was from an old navy family, they had twin girls and one of them died and they had her cremated and he had permission to bring her to sea. Her sister was at the last reunion, and wrote a book about it, and made the statement in there that her baby sister is guarded by 58 sailors. Because they are all down there. That is the story that not too many people know about.

There is close to still 1200 bodies on the Arizona, if you survived on the Arizona, you can be cremated, and you can be buried on the Arizona.

Did you realize what was going on?

It didn't take long to realize that we were under attack. When they first started coming in , we thought it was a mock attack from the air force. But you could see that red meatball on the wing of the plane. And we realized it wasn't a mock attack, and about that time bombs started dropping. We knew we was at war. It had never been declared. But we was at war. There was over 2600 people killed there at that attack that is why they started the pearl harbor survivors association. In order to belong you had to be there during the actual attack.

At one time we had approximately 70 that had been there. On the 50th anniversary, there was about 50 of us, and today there is about 18.

How many men served on the U.S.S. Vestal?

The Vestal had about 600. We had two crews. We had a ships company who took care of the ship, and a repair force and they took care of everything .It is amazing what that ship did during the war.

Tokyo Rose sunk us three times. But we made it through. Tokyo rose would be on the radio everyday telling us how bad the allies were doing how many ships we had lost, how many men we lost how great the Japanese fleet was and it was all made up. Trying to cut in on the moral of the ally troops.

I was on two and a half to three years on the vestal. We got hit twice at Pearl Harbor, we did all our own repair work. We repaired it ourselves. We pumped all the water out. They towed us over and put us in dry dock. We patched the hole in the bottom. And we spent 6-8 weeks and repairing our own damage. When we repaired we headed out. Worked on some ships one of the them the USS SD, We patched holes in ships, built bows to put on ships, bomb damage, they could do anything you wanted done. Everything from watch repair shop, to molding, cast

After the bombing.

After the bombing, for two weeks they wouldn't let you off the ship. After that they sent you over to the royal Hawaiian. For rest and recreation, 'chase the girls' is what they called it.

What was the mood like?

The moral was good. The men themselves. they had a job that had to be done. And we hadn't started the war, but they made up their minds that they would finish it. Everyone knew we were at war the minute they started dropping bombs. We were all scared. But we had a job to do, and nothing could stop us from doing it. Moral stayed high.

What did you do once you landed at the mud flats?

There wasn't anything we could do about it when we got to the mud flats, so we covered, and stayed out of the way. We did send repair force to help them during the attack. A lot of these people couldn't get to the ships .most went down pretty fast. When you come into port everything was open and a when you get a torpedo, that is a lot of water. we sent men to help them.

Did you have any way of letting your family know that you were all right?

It was two weeks after the bombing before they heard anything from me. That was a little postcard. They didn't have communication like today. We got to send a postcard. Almost a week after the bombing before we could sent a postcard out.

What about the people who didn't support the war?

Every once in a while you run into someone complaining that we dropped the bomb on Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

You talk to anybody who was in the service and any chance that they would be sent to Japan, if they had to invade it, and you will find somebody that said the bomb was the greatest thing that happened, by dropping the bomb, we saved thousand upon thousand lives, not just American, if we would have had to gone in there, they figured casualties would be anywhere 500,000 and a million people, if we would have invaded Japan.

They killed a lot of people, but it saved thousands upon thousands of lives. It was just one of those things. Harry Truman, when he made that decision to drop those bombs. Probably the hardest decision in his life. I know it was. There was not president before or after him that had to make a decision that was that monumental.

It would be nice if it didn't happen, but by the lives it saved, it was a good thing it did, that is the way war goes, and you do what you can to win it. We always tried to outguess them, and our people in charge were out-guessing them, and that is the reason we won the war so quick.

You will find a lot of people today that won't go a long with what we did.

The Pearl Harbor Survivors Association..

This is the second time around for me as president of SD pearl harbor survivor association.

You get together with people who have had the same experiences you have. You meet old friends you see only once a year. You get to visit and everyone always comes up what they call war stories. Things that happened to them.

Its fun we have all been through pretty much the same thing. You always learn something new.

It's not something anybody don't want to hear. You are all friends.

They are a different group of people you found during the Vietnam war. They are proud of what they done. There are some in Vietnam that are proud. But Vietnam was looked down upon. WW2 was a war the whole country was behind, because we had been attacked first. .

And with most of the ships in WW2, you never saw who you were shooting at. Bullets from the ship could carry 16 miles .Carrier planes could be attacking 150 miles away.

Do you think if your 17th birthday would have been after pearl harbor, you have enlisted?

I would have probably been in Omaha waiting, and I am sure I would have, that would have been five days after we were attacked.You couldn't keep them out of recruiting, It was one of those things that I would have wounded up in the army rather than the navy.My folks would have been against it.

What is it like to see all of the memorials so many years later?

This year especially there have been more attention paid to veterans than any year I can remember, and this year, it has been one thing after another for veterans, I am really happy that they have monument in Pierre.I would like to see it 25 years sooner, but it is coming along now, and I will be happy.

What did you do while you were attached the U.S.S Arizona?

There wasn't much we could do, we had one 3 in. anti aircraft gun. It jammed after the third round. When they hollered "underway" we got out and chopped the lines with fire axes. The Arizona, no one over there to throw them off for us, too much fire.

We only lost about 12 people, about 17 people were injured, 15, 16, or 17, we was lucky.

It was just one of those days, your number wasn't up. You remember it the rest of their life.We picked up bodies for days after that. We would be hauling supplies, and all of a sudden there would be a body.

The Arizona still has about 1200 men on her. I think the Oklahoma, one passageway had so many bodies and others were trapped in compartments below deck. Ships went down, and they couldn't get them out of there.

Your time frame isn't very long. Once the Oklahoma rolled over, people were trapped in some of the compartments you could hear them beating on the wall or the bulkhead of the compartment, and they knew someone was down there, and that is why they were cutting holes in the bottom. Some were able to get out that way, it wouldn't make any difference how soon you could get over there, you couldn't get to all of them. I think the longest anyone lived on one of these ships, was in one compartment that had several people in there until the 22nd or 23rd of December.