



PEARL HARBOR SURVIVORS RELIVE DECEMBER 7, 1941

PEARL HARBOR, OAHU, HI

The attack on Pearl Harbor was a pivotal event in the great American saga, reshaping our destiny and ushering in an era of terrifying conflict. Historians can give us the details of the event -- what happened, what led up to it, and what followed. But beyond these facts and scholarly interpretations, there is another story. It is the riveting tale of the men who were there that fateful day. It is the tale of the survivors.

Pearl Harbor survivors have something to share that is more moving, more personal and more meaningful than any objective third-party account of the attack could ever be. Theirs is an emotion-charged remembrance. They speak of anger, fear, sorrow and regret; and the haunting look in their eyes suggest these emotions are as fresh today as they were more than a half century ago.

"I joined up to see the world, not to fight a war." - Joe Morgan

Joe Morgan is the honorary chaplain of the USS *Arizona* Memorial. Over the years, he has been asked to perform burial ceremonies for many USS *Arizona* survivors who have chosen to be interred with their shipmates on the sunken vessel. By Morgan's own account, war was the last thing he expected when he joined the Navy as a teenager. "I joined up to see the world, not to fight a war. When the attack started, I was scared and looked for a place to hide."

Joe Morgan was on Ford Island when the bombs started falling December 7, 1941. He ran into a hangar and found a huge I-beam to shelter himself from the fury of the bullets, bombs and explosions. While he was hiding, Morgan noticed some of his shipmates were out on the tarmac armed with nothing more than handguns, and shooting back at the aircraft roaring overhead. "Here I was, a trained gunner hiding in an I-beam and I began to feel ashamed of myself. The shame overpowered my fear. I went into the armory and grabbed a machine gun to fight back." For Morgan and hundreds of other young men barely past boyhood, fear was a natural and understandable reaction to the devastation they witnessed. Yet, they rose above it and went on to serve with honor, and in many cases, great heroism.

"We started hearing someone tapping from inside the hull." - Richard Fiske

Richard Fiske was a Marine bugler serving on the battleship USS *West Virginia* at the time. The *West Virginia* suffered a crippling hit in the first few minutes of the attack and sank quickly. "There's one thing I remember in particular. On Monday (the day after the attack), we started hearing someone tapping from inside the hull. It echoed through the ship and we went all through the superstructure to find where it was coming. That tapping went on all week long. They sent divers down 14 times to find

those guys. Finally, around December 18th or 19th, they had to stop looking. They did the best they could, but they just couldn't find them. We didn't know who was down there, but the tapping continued until December 24th," Fiske said.

With obvious difficulty, Fiske went on, "When we went into dry-dock on June 18, 1942, we found them. They were in the last watertight compartment we opened. We found a calendar and a clock with them. For me, that clock is one of the most precious artifacts found, because it reminds me of those guys. I often wonder what they were thinking about. Their lives were cut so short and they never had a chance to realize their dreams."

"Crews were going around in small boats picking guys out of the water as they floated up." Warren Verhoff

The horrifying memories of the attack are burned on the hearts and minds of the survivors. "There are some sights you remember so well. I have a vivid memory of going around Ford Island and seeing this one guy hanging in the rigging. He must have been up there most of the week because we were just too busy down below to get up there and lower him down. Crews were going around in small boats picking guys out of the water as they floated up. Many of these 'floaters,' as they were called, came up with no arms, no legs, things like that. It's something I'll never forget," said Warren Verhoff, crewman on the USS *Keosauqua*.

For most of the men caught in the merciless surprise, the attack seemed to last forever, though it was actually only a couple of hours long. Verhoff continued, "I remember being mad all through the day. But then, in the evening we started to get scared because we didn't know what would happen next. For months I dreamed about planes."

"The count on the Oklahoma was the second largest loss of life." Richard C. Husted

Seamen First Class Richard C. Husted was rushing back from a rare overnight liberty with his family in Haleiwa when he discovered that his ship the USS *Oklahoma* had already capsized, taking more than 400 of his shipmates to their deaths. "I had left my uncle at Schofield where he was stationed and from there I really don't know how I made it to the small boat harbor. That's when I was told about the *Oklahoma*," Husted said.

After collecting his composure, Husted continued, "She was my first ship and it's difficult to talk about. The count on the *Oklahoma* was the second largest loss of life. The fact that I was not aboard disturbed me for many a year, but I really didn't talk about it. At the 30th reunion, I joined the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association and I could finally start talking – it sort of freed me up. Being out at the Memorial as a volunteer is sort of a catharsis, because I wasn't there when it happened."

"I saw a torpedo drop and our guns were firing." - Bill Speer

Bill Speer had just stepped out of his morning shower on the light cruiser USS *Honolulu* when the attack began. "I saw a torpedo drop and our guns were firing before they'd even sounded general quarters. I ran to my battle station and went through the rest of that day without getting fully dressed." Speer tells of the deep sorrow they felt during those first terrible hours. "We could clearly see the *Arizona* and all of battleship row from our post. At one point we were all just standing there with tears

in our eyes watching the devastation and feeling helpless, with nothing to be done about it.”

For many survivors, “doing something about it” meant getting back to their posts as quickly as possible, even if they were injured. Of the hundreds of men wounded in the attack, only 10 percent stayed in their hospital beds more than a day. The rest went almost immediately back to their duties. “That gives you an idea of our patriotism,” Speer said with a note of pride.

“No matter how severely injured, we will fight for life.” – Everett Hyland

For those who were the most severely wounded, such heroism was simply not an option. Everett Hyland was standing on the deck of the USS Pennsylvania when she took a direct hit from a 500-lb. bomb. “We’d gotten through the first wave of the attack okay. Unfortunately, we weren’t so lucky with the second. I happened to be standing near where the bomb exploded when it hit. It knocked me through the air and I landed flat on my face.”

Hyland suffered multiple wounds and severe burns on his hands and face. Of his entire squad, he was the only one to survive. “I think it’s a basic part of humanity, the will to stay alive. No matter how severely injured, we will fight for life.” It would be nine long months after the attack before Hyland would even get out of the hospital.

“We started to wonder whether it would hurt more to be shot by a 25 caliber bullet from a Japanese weapon, than our own 30 caliber rifles” - Robert Kinzler

Robert Kinzler, current president of the Hawaii Pearl Harbor Survivors Association chapter, was not at Pearl Harbor when the bombs began to fall. He was stationed at Schofield Barracks. His vantagepoint was a few miles from the inferno in the harbor, but the experience was nonetheless gripping. “I remember the sound of the first bombs hitting Wheeler Airfield. There were 353 planes in the air that day but I only remember hearing one,” said Kinzler.

“We had to pass Pearl Harbor to get to our battle station across town, at Roosevelt High School, and we could see huge columns of thick black smoke and deep orange flames rising up from Pearl Harbor,” continued Kinzler. “We felt totally powerless and we began to wonder about an invasion. We started to wonder whether it would hurt more to be shot by a 25-caliber bullet from a Japanese weapon, than our own 30 caliber rifles. When you’re 19 and facing such things, your mind goes to a strange place.”

Conclusion

For each of these men and the others, who join them in the ranks of survivors, Pearl Harbor is more than a day that will live in infamy. It was an event that completely redefined their lives, and left them wrestling the immutable question – “why me?” With a catch in his throat, Richard Fiske sums it up with eloquent simplicity; “I pray every day because the good Lord was with us.”

We are fortunate to have these men in our midst. They enrich us with a deep sense of duty, honor and country; and, they teach us valuable lessons about courage, fear, war, peace, anger and forgiveness. We owe them our gratitude, and our freedom.

The USS *Arizona* Memorial was dedicated on Memorial Day 1962 to commemorate the attack on Pearl Harbor and the men who died defending it. In 1989, the USS Arizona was designated a national historic landmark. Since 1980, the National Park Service has operated the Memorial and the Visitor Center to ensure the preservation and interpretation of the tangible historical resources associated with the attack – including the rich and vivid memories of its survivors. Veterans have always played a key part in maintaining this historic site. In fact, funding for the USS Arizona Memorial is provided in part by the Arizona Memorial Museum Association, a group of Pearl Harbor survivors and others interested in preserving this important legacy.

Each year, the USS Arizona Memorial welcomes more than 1.4 million visitors from around the world. To accommodate its international and out-of-state visitors, the Park has brochures written in 23 different languages including English, as well as an audio program which is currently offered in English, Chinese and Japanese.

The USS Arizona Memorial Visitor Center is located adjacent to Kamehameha Highway, near the Aloha Stadium, between Ford Island Bridge and Pearl Harbor's Makalapa Gate. To reach the USS Arizona Memorial from Waikiki, take the H-1 Freeway to the Airport Viaduct and follow the signs to the Arizona Memorial Exit 15A.

The Visitor Center is open 7:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. every day except Thanksgiving, December 25 and New Year's Day, with tours beginning every 15 minutes, and the last program starting at 3 p.m. Admission is free and tours are given on a first-come, first-serve basis. Reservations are not accepted. If you have questions, you can access recorded information at (808) 422-0561. To reach a National Park Service representative, call (808) 422-2771. To contact the Arizona Memorial Museum Association, call (808) 422-5664 or (808) 422-5905. The web site address for the USS Arizona Memorial is www.nps.gov/usal, while the address for the Arizona Memorial Museum Association is <http://arizonamemorial.org>.

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