

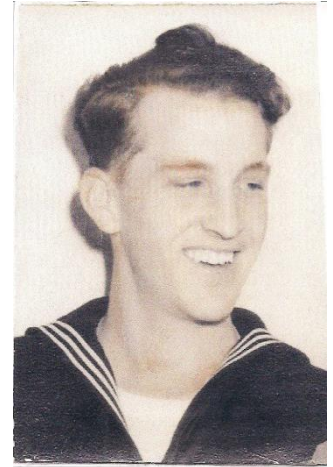
# PEARL HARBOR SURVIVORS



*The San Ramon Valley Veterans Service  
Organizations and the Diablo Valley Community*  
Recognition of our local **Pearl Harbor  
Survivors** on Veteran's Day

November 11, 2014

# PEARL HARBOR SURVIVORS





**1939**



**2014**

**Merle Christensen - USN**

# Merle Christensen - USN

I joined the US Navy, right out of high school, in October of 1937, from Viborg, South Dakota. Checked in at the Naval Training Station, Great Lakes, Ill and started training as a Boot Apprentice Seaman. Upon completion of boot training I reported to Naval Training Station, San Diego, CA in early 1938 for training in Naval Gunnery School.

In mid-1938 I checked in aboard the USS Langley while in Mare Island Navy Yard for repairs. The Langley was quite a unique creation. It had been a coal supply distribution ship in World War I. It was known as the USS Jupiter. However in the 1920s the navy put a flight deck on her and it became the US Navy's first aircraft carrier designated USS Langley (CV-1). However in the late 20s early 30s several of the first modern keel up carriers were put into service. The Langley was no longer needed as a carrier. The Langley became a seaplane tender, AV-3, to maintain and service the PBY, Catalina and PBM, Mariner sea planes.

I worked in the Gunnery Division and became interested in aviation ordinance. We slept in hammocks.

In late 1939 the Langley was assigned to Sangley Point, The Philippines While the ship was enroute I got orders to go to VP25 ( Patrol Squadron 25), at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor.

On Dec 7 1941 I had the duty, but had been in Honolulu with my friends' place, Bob and Mildred Graham. Bob was an officer in the National Guard and had very nice family quarters right down town about a block from the YMCA. I had a locker for civilian clothes, a target pistol and anything I could not have on the base. I was on my way out of Bobs place when Mildred got a call from her sister who was married to a GI at Hickam-she reported lots of heavy explosions were being heard. Several minutes later as I was traveling past Hickam, a few Japanese Zeros were making a strafing run on the cars traveling along Kamehameha Avenue. I saw a couple of cars that had taken evasive action-off the road and I also saw palm fronds from the tops of the palm trees falling to the ground.

I also got a brief but close up look at the Meat Ball on the side and the pilot flashing by, on at least one plane and maybe two or more. This was the moment that I realized we were at war. At that time the heavy bombing and torpedoing had concluded in and around Hickam and Pearl Harbor. I continued on to my intended destination- the parking lot at the Naval Hospital where I would get on the regular barge that ran a schedule over to the Ford Island Landing

I recall the barge was running on time and we only had a few passengers get on. When we got part ways we stopped to pull at least one of our personnel from the water. He did not seem to be aware of anything and he was cover with black crude oil that was all over on the water.

As the launch approached the dock I could now see the unbelievable damage that the battleships had taken. Several were still smoking,-the USS Arizona I believe was still putting up flames although the smoke was so heavy. The two battleships that were tied together, the first in line had rolled over and the other had sunk down to the main deck.

In my urgency to get to the squadron I took off on the run for our hangar-next to the end one and found that all except one of our planes were destroyed or still burning.

As I entered our main hanger, I was rocked by the blast of an explosion, within the hanger, and was peppered with small particles of concrete. This to my knowledge was the only personal physical injury that I experienced on Dec 7<sup>th</sup>. However, when I got back to Alameda in 1943 the medics removed a very small cement like particle from one of my eyes. -I have since forgotten which eye it was.

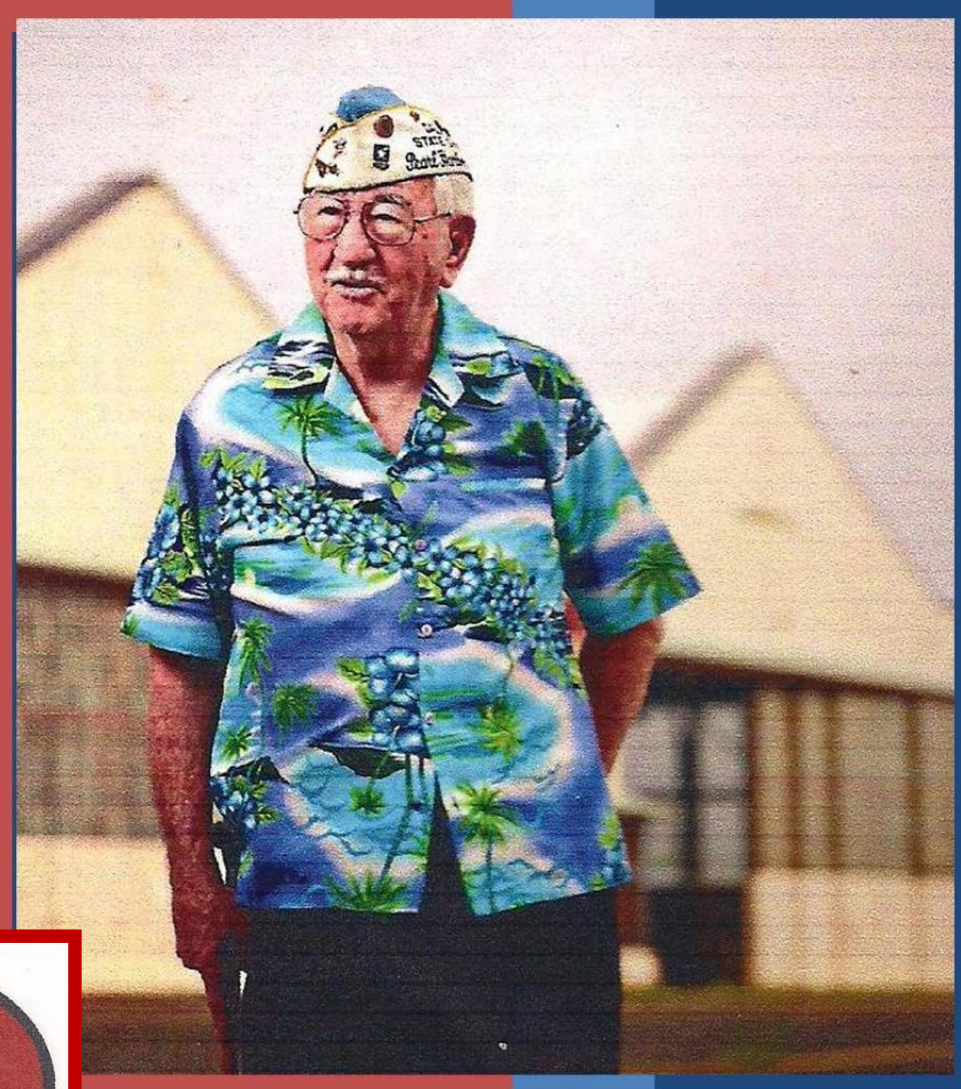
It was decided that we should send up an airplane that appeared to be flyable. As a senior ordnance man, with access to keys, I grabbed a bomb handling truck and an ordnance man helper to go to the ammunition storage vault, located west across the island, for belted 50 and 30 caliber ammunition to load on the plane.

During that process of launching our one available aircraft, the USS Shaw exploded in its dry dock directly opposite our launching area.

We never launched our aircraft.



1941



2013

**SGT Sam Clower - USA**

## **SGT Sam Clower - USA**

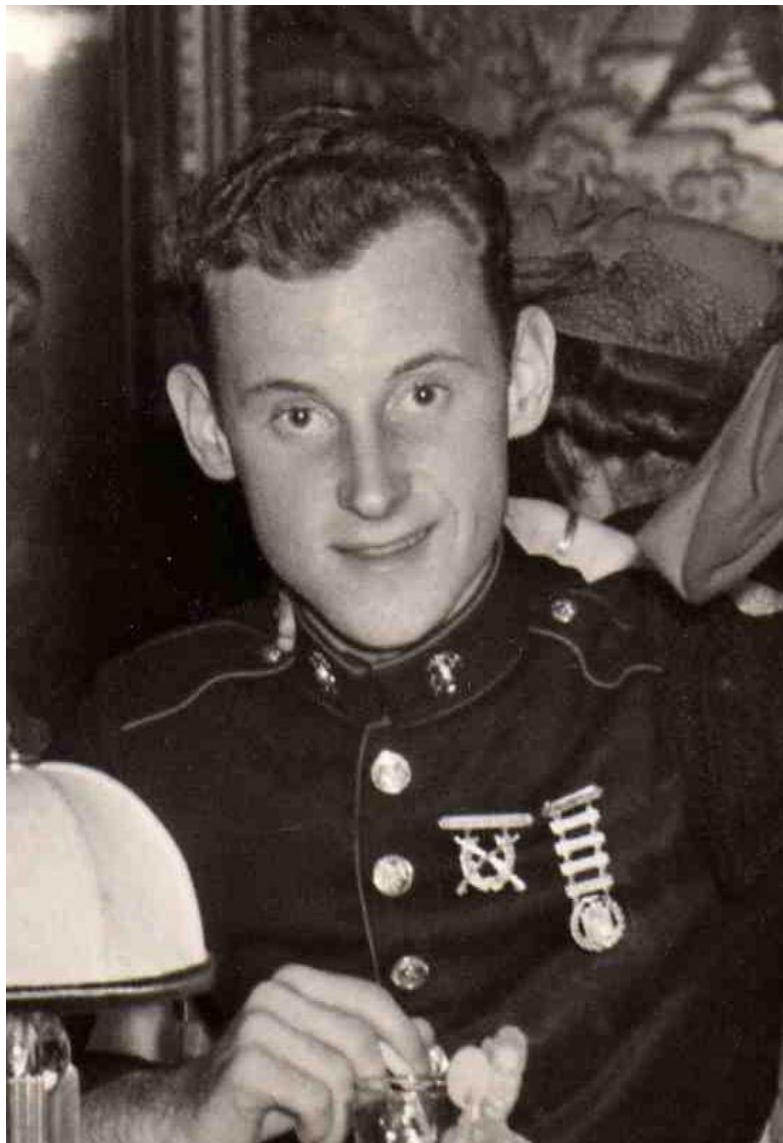
“I was just finishing morning chow when all of a sudden there were planes flying about 200 feet over our head,” said Sam Clower, former first sergeant of Headquarters Company, 19th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. “We could tell that they were Japanese planes, because of the rinsing sun emblem on them, but we had no idea why they were here.

In 1941, there were concerns that the Japanese would attempt to poison the water supply on the island of Oahu, so Clower took his company and set up a solid perimeter around the Schofield reservoir to prevent any type of sabotage. The reservoir was located off the end of Wheeler Army Air Field.

“We shut it down immediately, but we still had no idea what was going on,” said Clower, “I called the regiment to find out what was happening and they told me to gather everyone up because they were bombing Pearl Harbor and the barracks. The guy on the phone barely got those words out before they started bombing Wheeler Army Airfield.”

Because most of the planes were lined up at the end of the airfield, Wheeler sustained a crippling loss of aircraft, totaling 79 planes completely destroyed. Our company observed Wheeler Airfield being destroyed before us and there was nothing we could do but watch.

“Many began that day as boys, but quickly became men. It wasn’t a choice, it wasn’t an option. It was just one of the things we faced and dealt with. We were thrust into manhood, and we all grew up that day.”



**1941**



**2012**

**John Egan - USMC**



## John Egan - USMC

**Sergeant John Maurice Francis Egan** was born in Hammond, Indiana. He enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve at the US Naval Reserve Armory, Chicago, Illinois on November 14, 1938. He was assigned to Company "D", 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion USMCR. His military records indicate that he was born on October 2, 1921. Sgt Egan, in an honorable attempt to finally set the record straight, freely admitted that he was really born in 1923. He was honorably discharged from the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve in order to enlist in the Regular Marine Corps on January 11, 1940. He reported to Recruit Depot, Base Troops, Marine Base San Diego, CA on January 16, 1940.

On June 21, 1940 he was ordered to report directly to the Marine Detachment, USS San Francisco (CA-38) when the battle cruiser arrived at Puget Sound Naval Station for an overhaul. As a member of the Marine Detachment, he was aboard when the USS San Francisco returned to her homeport in Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii on September 29, 1940. He was promoted to PFC on August 4, 1941.

On the morning of December 7, 1941 the USS *San Francisco* was awaiting docking and the cleaning of her heavily fouled bottom. Her engineering plant was largely broken down for overhaul. Ammunition for her 5 inch and 8-inch guns had been placed in storage. Her 3-inch guns had been removed to permit installation of four 1.1-inch quadruple mounts. The 1.1-inch mounts had not been installed. Her .50 caliber machine guns were being overhauled. Only small arms and two .30 caliber machine guns were available. Moreover, a number of the *San Francisco's* officers and men were absent. In other words the ship was almost defenseless.

At 0755, Japanese planes began bombing dives on Ford Island, and by 0800, the surprise air attack was well underway. The men in *San Francisco* had secured the ship for watertightness and had begun looking for opportunities to fight back. Some crossed to *USS New Orleans* to help with their anti-aircraft batteries. Others began using the available rifles and machine guns. Fifty caliber machine gun ammunition was transferred to *USS Tracy* for use aboard that ship.

On the morning of December 7, 1941 Pvt. Egan was on duty, raising the colors on the USS San Francisco when the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor started.



**1940**



**2012**

**Mickey Ganitch - USN**

# Mickey Ganitch - USN

Mickey Ganitch was born November 18, 1919 in Mogadore, Ohio. He moved to California in 1939 and joined the Navy on January 21, 1941.

He attended Boot Camp and Quartermaster/Signal man School in Dan Diego, CA. In August 1941 he joined the USS Pennsylvania (BB-38) at Pearl Harbor.

On Sunday, December 7, 1941 the USS Pennsylvania was in dry dock, across the channel from Ford Island and "Battleship Row". Mickey and his fellow football teammates were preparing for the Fleet Championship, against the USS Arizona (BB-39). "Since we were in dry dock, we had donned our football uniforms, before leaving the ship at 0800 for a practice scrimmage.

"At about 0755 the first alarm "General Quarters" was sounded throughout the ship. "Hearing the alarm you report to your battle station immediately, in whatever you are wearing. As my battle station was in the crow's nest of the main mast, I reported there in my football uniform, minus cleats and football helmet." The shoulder pads made it difficult to get through the trapdoor."

The USS Pennsylvania was reported to be the first ship to fire on the attacking enemy aircraft. During the attack the ship suffered 15 men killed in action (KIA), 14 missing in action (MIA) and 38 wounded. The football game was never played. Later, when he came home to Ohio, on leave, in 1942 Mickey learned that one of his neighbors, who went to a different high school, was on the USS Arizona. He and his neighbor was to have played in the same game that December morning. They would have played against each other, just as they did in high school.

Mickey's neighbor still is aboard the USS Arizona.

On August 12, 1945, at Okinawa, the USS Pennsylvania was hit by a Japanese torpedo. "The torpedo struck in the rear of the ship, near the propellers. This area was the living compartment of the Pennsylvania's quartermasters. From my crew of 26, I lost 23 of my quartermasters that day.

The next day the Japanese sued for peace."

After the War, Mickey remained in the Navy. He retired from the Navy on October 10, 1963, as a Senior Chief Quartermaster.



*June 1941 E.J. 'Chuck' Kohler U.S. Navy  
Naval Training Center, Great Lakes, Illinois.*

**1941**



**2014**

**Chuck & Judy Kohler**

**Chuck Kohler - USN**

## **Chuck Kohler - USN**

Chuck Kohler was born on a farm in West Central Minnesota. He enlisted in the US Navy, age 17, on April 2, 1941 and completed boot training at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, Lake Michigan, IL. He was sent to Detroit, MI for training in Aviation Metal Smith. Upon completion of his training he was sent to San Diego, CA where he boarded the aircraft carrier USS Lexington for assignment to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii

In October 1941 he reported to Aerial Patrol Squadron, VP 23, located on Ford Island, in the center of Pearl Harbor.

“On the morning of December 7, 1941, I was assigned to the security watch, 0800 hrs to 1200 hrs, in the hanger building #54. I was up in an office trying to type a letter to my dear, sweet, mother," Kohler began. "I was hunting-and-pecking, when I heard an approaching aircraft.”

“The sound wasn't unusual; this was a naval air base. But it was Sunday, and that struck me as odd.”

"Then the sound changed. I knew it was in a power dive. Even so, I told myself it was a pilot doing some hot-dogging. I was thinking, I don't want to be in his shoes when the captain finds out. Little did I know, we were in a lot more trouble than that."

“A tremendous explosion shot glass and debris into the room. Stunned, I thought I'd best get outside to help. Ripping the letter from the typewriter to avoid possible later punishment, I crumpled the note, tossed it aside and rushed outside to a world I had never encountered before.

"I saw a plane coming in with blinking, flashing lights. Being a farm boy, I didn't recognize them -- found out later they were actually machine guns firing".

"A bomb, strapped to the bottom of the plane was a considerable distraction to me."

"When I saw that big red Rising Sun on the starboard wing -- I realized these weren't the friendly boys I thought they were,"

After being chewed out by a duty officer for refusing to take cover in a construction ditch, (I wanted my family to know that I died fighting, not hiding) another sailor and I took action:

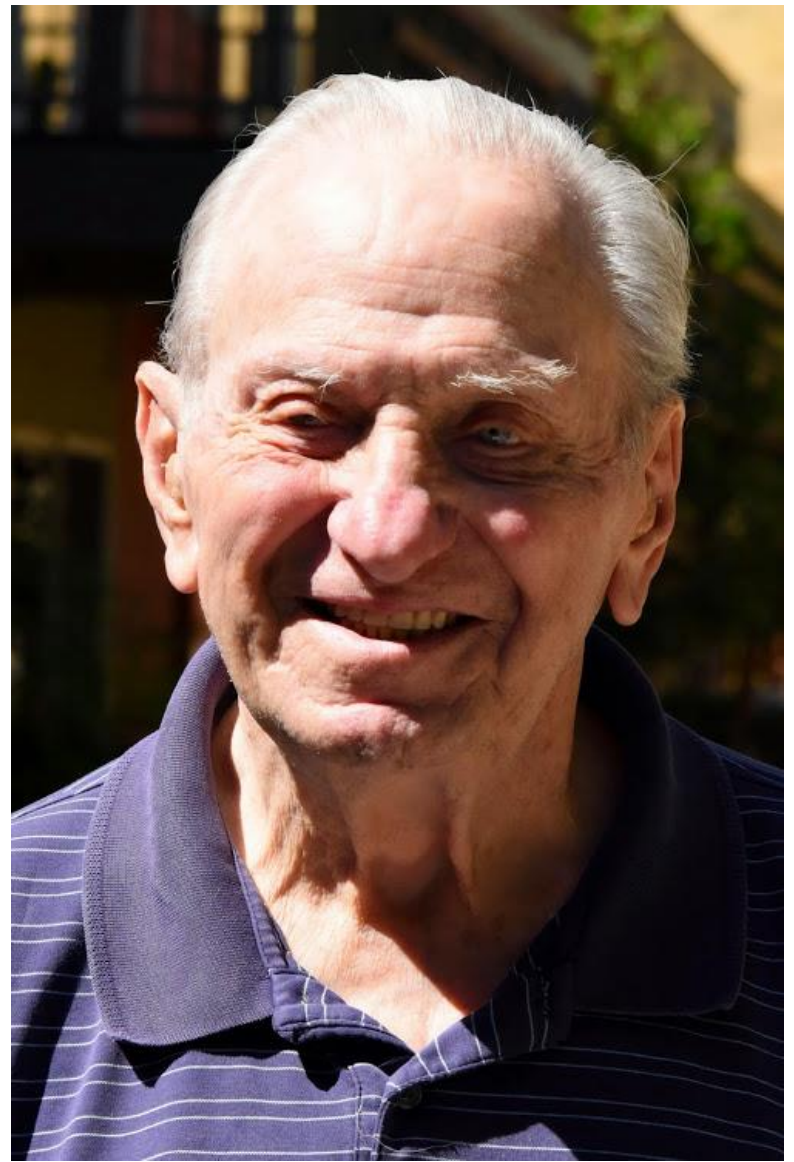
"There were bombs and bullets ringing down and all our ammo was locked up. We finally got a mounted .50 caliber machine gun. The biggest gun I'd ever handled on the farm was a .22. This thing was like a canon without wheels! We managed to hoist it up into a PBY Catalina airplane and fired at the attacking aircraft..

"Now, I'm hearing popping sounds; bullets slamming through the fuselage. My country boy instinct kicked in -- where I grew up, being a good shot was the difference between dinner and going hungry -- and I laced a trail of fire along one plane."

Eventually, Kohler said planes "like swarms of bees" descended, before the smoke grew thick and blacked them out.



**1941**



**2014**

**Carl Marble - USN**

# Carl Marble - USN

Carl Marble was born on Dec 11, 1918 on a farm in Copper Iowa. On his 18th birthday, Carl took the oath to enlist in the Navy in 1936. Two days later, Carl arrived by train at the U. S. Naval Training Station in San Diego.

On December 7, 1941, Carl had been detached duty from the USS Enterprise (CV-6), to set up the Naval Air Supply, for the Naval Air Corps, at Ford Island,

The Army had just given the Navy the use of Luke Field for Navy aircraft carrier planes. Carl was in Aviation Supply and was one of four USS Enterprise sailors who did not go with the carrier during it's three day trip to Wake Island.

At 7:55 am, Carl was waiting for the ferry at the Merry Point Ferry Landing to go to Ford Island to meet the USS Enterprise at it's expected arrival time of 8:00 am. When the attack began, the Japanese planes flew very low, over his head and were dropping torpedoes aimed at the battleships, anchored at Ford Island. He was in the open and there was no obvious cover other than a tiny tree.

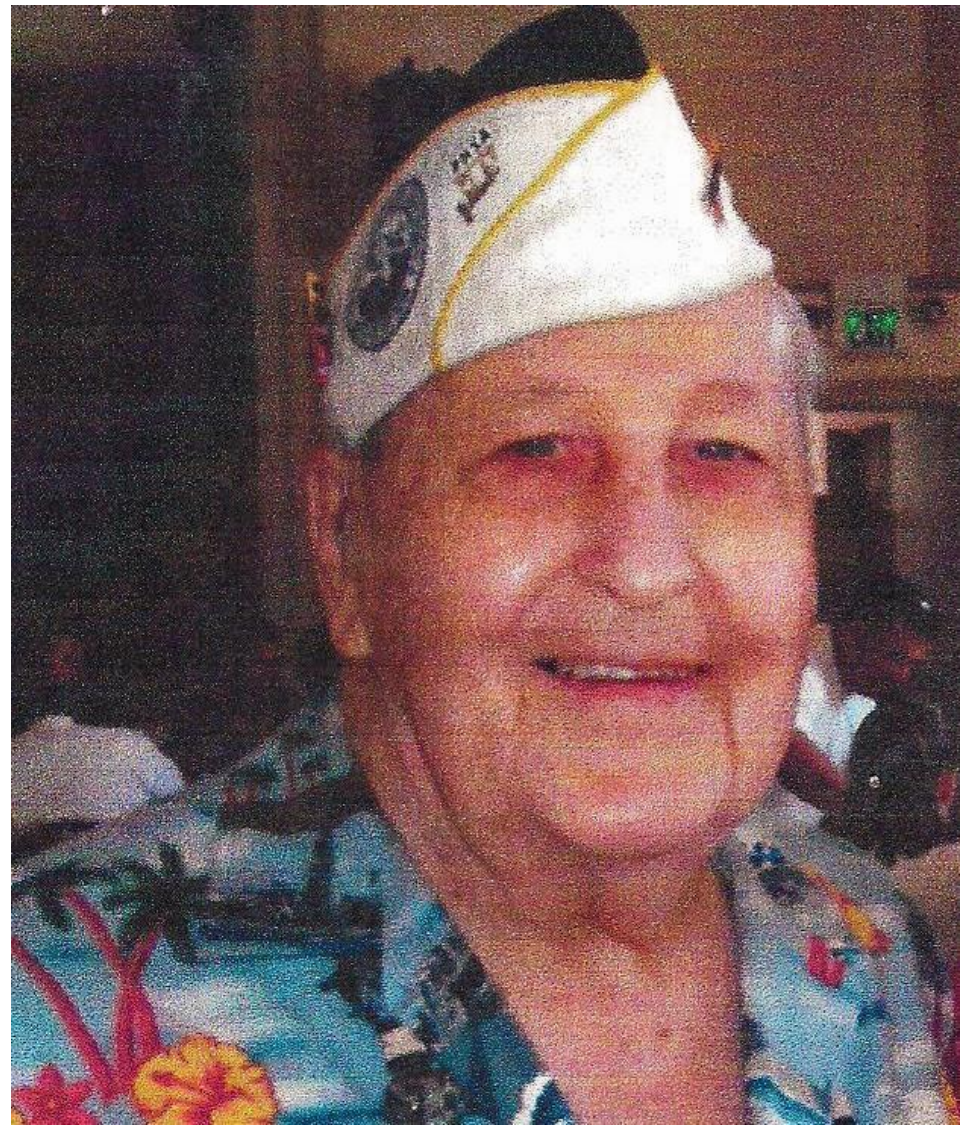
Eventually he got across to Ford Island, found his truck, loaded other passengers and drove to the Fleet Aviation Central Store, which was on the Pearl City side of Ford Island. Sailors from the bombed ships began arriving at the store in search of clothing. Carl and his staff opened the store for these men, but since most of the supply was aviation parts, they opened their personal clothing lockers, for them to take whatever they needed.

That night, Carl was ordered to man a 50 caliber machine gun on top of the roof of the supply building, in anticipation of another Japanese attack. There was no light or communication on base. They were told to shoot at any planes coming in. At around 7:00 PM, planes came in and 6 were shot down. Tragically these planes were Grumman,, F4F Wildcats, from VF6 from the USS Enterprise.





**1941**



**2014**

**Benjamin James Smith - USN**

# **Benjamin James Smith - USN**

**“I was born on November 19, 1920 in Shawmut, Montana and joined the Navy in 1939. After boot camp I was assigned to the USS California (BB-44).”**

**“At the start of the War I was a Third Class Storekeeper and had duty in the Pay Office. On December 7, 1941 the USS California was moored at the southernmost berth of Battleship Row. At 7:50 AM “General Quarters” was sounded.”**

**“Just by luck, I saw one of the Japanese planes drop a bomb, hitting the doors of the hanger, just off the side of the ship. It didn’t take long for me to realize that war was starting and I immediately went to my battle station, which was on the 3<sup>rd</sup> deck, port side and below the water line.”**

**“We brought anti-aircraft ammunition up from the magazines and by use of the conveyer belts and hoists sent it on to the guns on the upper decks. It was not long before the first torpedo hit the ship and it took an immediate list to port. The lights went out and by use of the battle lanterns we were able to continue our job. Even though we were without lights our conveyer belt and hoists continued to work.”**

**“The second torpedo hit was aft and we lost all power and had to continue by hand. I don’t know how long we were doing our job by hand when a 1,500 pound bomb exploded almost over our heads. Something hit me at that time and I was out like the lights.”**

“The fire and rescue team came through and I was believed dead and taken to the aft of the ship and piled with the other dead sailors. “Abandon Ship” was sounded and the wounded were taken off on the starboard side, while the “dead” were tossed into the drink on the port side.”

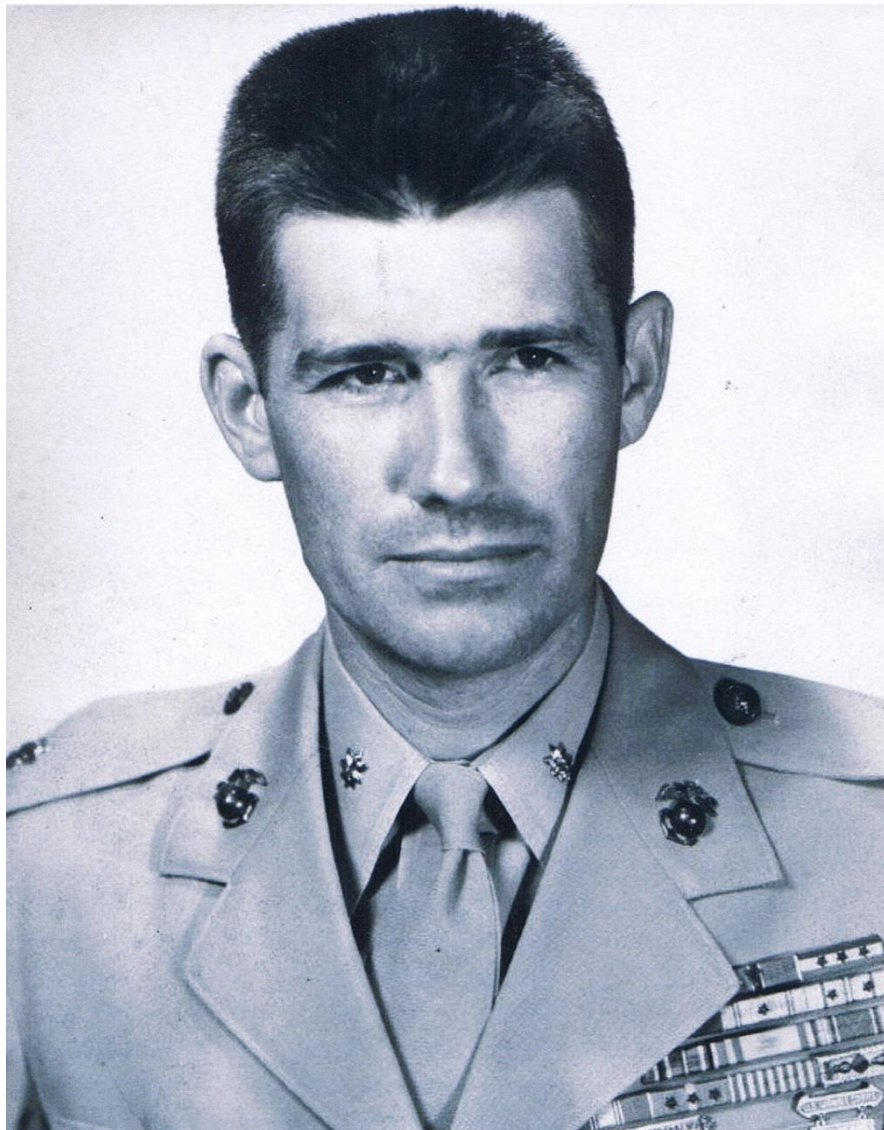
“I came to underwater and thinking “Smith this is no place for you!”, so I swam to the surface where there were other swimmers. They were all splashing trying to get the bunker fuel away as part of it was on fire. I can remember trying to do my part but little else. I remembered no more.”

“When I next came to, I was in the temporary hospital in the Navy Yard and had suffered from a concussion.”

“Because of my rating and job, I was assigned as part of the nucleus crew, serving on the California, through her salvage and temporary repairs, in Pearl Harbor. We then sailed to the Baltimore Navy Yard, where the ship was completely repaired and modernized.”

“The ship returned to active duty for the invasion of the Marianas and later into the Philippines where she was hit by a kamikaze aircraft and had to return to the Navy Yard for repairs.”

“Shortly thereafter I was promoted to “Warrant Pay Clerk.”



2014

John & Jodi Stevens

**John Stevens - USMC**

## **John Stevens - USN**

John Stevens was born on April 22, 1921, in Butte, Montana. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1939, attending boot training at the Recruit Depot, San Diego. He also attended training at the, Field Telephone School at the Signal Detachment, San Diego. Upon completion of his training he was assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Defense Battalion. The 1<sup>st</sup> Defense Battalion was moved to Pearl Harbor in February 1941. In late 1941, then Sergeant Stevens was assigned to Midway Island. Sgt. Stevens returned to Pearl Harbor, shortly before December 7, 1941.

On Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, Sgt. Stevens was 20 years old, with 2 plus years of service. He was, at that time assigned to the Machine Gun Group of the 1<sup>st</sup> Defense Battalion.

Here is his story of that faithful day”

“I was still in bed when I heard the noise of explosions and airplanes. Getting up, I went outside to see what was going on and I saw planes, with red balls on them, strafing our area. Going back inside, I got my World War 1, bolt action rifle, my World War 1, tin hat and gas mask. I did not have any ammunition for my rifle. Going back outside I headed for the gun shed where our machine guns were stored. We did have ammunition for our machine guns and we set our machine guns up and went into action.”

While the battalion had some 3 inch anti-aircraft guns, the ammunition was stored elsewhere. The attack was long over before the ammunition arrived.

The machine gun group was deployed to various defense positions around the Navy Yard. My job was to get telephone connections between the various gun positions and the group's command post. One of the sites was near the Naval Hospital. I will never forget the sight of the dead being brought in from the harbor and stacked up like cordwood, outside the Hospital.

The attack, of course, was over in a very short time. Our casualties ashore were only 4 wounded.

After the attack and throughout the next day, we heard rumors that the Japanese were landing on the North Shore, that our water supply had been poisoned and so on.

Our battalion Sergeant Major had 30 years of service and was about to retire. I remember him saying, "What a GD time to start a GD war!"

That night a flight of F4F, Grumman Wildcats, from the USS Enterprise, was returning and land at Ford Island. They were mistaken for enemy aircraft and the whole Island opened up on them. Four of the Wildcats out of 6 were shot down, before the firing could be halted. The next day the local newspapers reported the "attack", but indicated only minimal damage was done.

While the attack was over in a very short time, the memories will last forever."



1941



2014

**John Tait - USN**

# John Tait - USN

Here's John's remembrance of that day.

I joined the Navy from Oakland in August of 1940. After boot camp in San Diego, I was told get my gear together and get on a bus. We went to Long Beach and were taken by launch to the USS St. Louis, (CL 49) a brand new light cruiser. We were told where to stow our gear and where the mess hall was and where we would hang our hammocks at night.

After we were settled aboard, the ship got underway for Hawaii. Six (6) days later we entered Pearl Harbor. Another boot and I were assigned to the R division. Shortly thereafter I was told I would help keep the Chiefs compartment clean, for the next 3 months.

Nine (9) months later I was relieved and went to the shipfitters shop. I was then assigned to be in charge of the ships potable, drinking, water system.

In August of 1941 the ship got orders to escort an old Navy transport ship to the Philippines. After we got under way, our Skipper informed the other ships that were with us to darken the ships, from here until we were back in Hawaiian waters. The Captain on the Henderson, a cargo ship, told him that they were noncombatants and did not play war games. Our skipper told them to stop their engines, and that he was sending a boarding party to darken the ship.

We were back in Pearl Harbor for Thanksgiving in November 1941.



On December 7 we were docked at a pier in the Southeast Lock. At 0756, Japanese planes were sighted by observers on board the St. Louis. Within minutes the ship was at general quarters, and her operable anti-aircraft guns were manned and firing on the attackers. At about 0820, one of the cruisers gun crews shot down its first Japanese torpedo plane. By 0900 two more Japanese aircraft had joined the first. I was below deck while most of the bombing was going on. It took almost two hours to get steam up to get us underway.

The ship headed for South Channel and the open sea. As the St. Louis moved into the channel entrance, she became the target of a Japanese midget submarine. The two torpedoes that the sub fired at us, however, exploded after hitting a coral reef between us and the sub, about 200 yards away.

We were told that the USS Nevada was blocking the channel. Our Captain said he would push it to one side if he had to. No ship was allowed to go faster than 8 knots when in the channel, we were doing 25 or more when we got the open sea.

Once out a sea we joined other ships in the search for the Japanese fleet. After failing to locate the Japanese fleet we returned to Pearl Harbor on December 10, 1941

For surviving the torpedo attack the USS St Louis was nicknamed "LUCKY LOU".