

Lloyd O. Johnson  
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HOW FORTUNATE I WAS! & DIDN'T EVEN KNOW IT

During our recent trip to Honolulu where we attended the 40th anniversary of the "Bombing of Pearl Harbor" convention of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association I had a number of interesting conversations, one strictly by chance, about the strafing of the road approaching Pearl Harbor, and inside the Navy Yard itself by Japanese planes on December 7th.

I knew that there had been one or more strafing attacks in the general vicinity of the Main Gate and the Enlisted Mens' Landing. For instance, as I entered the Navy Yard, after having driven approximately ten miles from Center Street in Kaimiki, in my old 1937 Ford Coupe, I let my brother-in-law, Bruce "Wahoo" Harrison (of the USS CASE), off at the Enlisted Mens' Landing and proceeded on to the Officers' Landing.

I learned later that he and the others in the vicinity were strafed by Japanese planes, scattering and finding shelter the best they could. Also, or possibly earlier, another friend of mine, Bob Hendon, the Chief Gunners' Mate (later LCDR) and his wife Vera had arrived in the Navy Yard. They had hid behind old armor plates stored in the area to avoid the strafing planes!

In my own case, however, I saw planes dive bombing as we approached the Navy Yard, and one large plane in the area of Aiea flying low; possibly it crashed. During the time I was driving in the Navy Yard, waited at the Officers' Landing for a boat to take me to the USS WHITNEY, we were opposite the sunken and burning battleships, and as well saw the smoke from the Navy Yard and Ford Island; but I never saw any planes. Neither did I see any en-route to my ship. I was unaware of the strafing attack on the Enlisted Mens Landing where my brother-in-law was waiting for a boat.

After I had gotten back to the WHITNEY, and gone to my battle station in Ammunition Supply, our AA gun did fire a few times at planes flying over. At the time we thought they might be our own planes; however, from what I have



read, most likely they were the Japanese reconnaissance planes taking photographs the damage resulting from the earlier attacks. By this time the Japanese attack planes were well on their way back to their carriers. I was also aware that there had been a few bombs dropped on Honolulu, or even possibly shells fired from some of our own ships which did some damage, and casualties resulted. Possibly this was behind me. I always thought that it was.

I had a number of inquiries from survivors about straffing attacks on the road to Pearl Harbor which brought some other items to light. One asked me if I saw many cars and trucks in the ditches alongside the road approaching the Navy Yard Gate, either abandoned during these attacks, or as the result of being straffed. I remembered nothing, and if I saw them, it made no impression on me.

I was stopped by a man on the street at Waikiki, who <sup>saw</sup> my survivor's hat and we engaged in an enlightening exchange. At the time, recently discharged from the Army, he had been working in the Navy Yard as a civilian employee and witnessed the initial attack. He told me that a friend of his was killed on the road during one of these straffing attacks.

Later at the Convention Banquet, we learned from our waitress that her husband, a civilian bus driver was killed during the attack. Now, all this took place either ahead of me, behind me, or probably both. Therefore, I feel that it was only by lucky chance that I was able to drive ten miles during the attack and get to my ship safely.

And it forty years later that I learn how fortunate I was! Of course, these straffing attacks were of small consequence compared to the terrible damage and havoc wrecked to the airfields and ships, nevertheless it becomes a very fortunate thing to those of us who survived. For instance, there was a gunner's mate first class from one of the tenders who was pressed into service as a gun crew member on one of the cruisers tied up in the Navy Yard, as he was trying to get back to his ship, and he was killed by a bomb! I drove a car possibly ten miles, I waited on the dock in the yard some time, and I woad a boat back to my ship, all in lulls between Japanese attacks! How lucky I was!