

HOW I REMEMBER PEARL HARBOR

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On December 7th, 1941, I had served aboard the USS WHITNEY approximately two years, first as Acting Pay Clerk and then as Pay Clerk. I was the Commissary and Ship's Store Officer; the Supply Officer was LCDR, Charles Schaaf. At the time, COMDESPAC was embarked aboard the WHITNEY, and I had been added to the Coding Board. My battle station at General Quarters was in charge of ammunition supply, on the first deck, right outside the Supply Office on the starboard side. Amunition was stowed in magazines two decks further down. The ammunition handlers were from the Repair Department.

During my duty, up until that time, we held regular general quarters drills and we did the following: a gunner's mate would get the keys to the magazines from the Captain's Cabin, and the men would climb down into the magazines and get one or two dummy 5-inch shells and powder, and others would get one or two fixed 3-inch .50 caliber fixed AA shells. The 5-inch shells would be carried up to the guns on the main deck, but the AA shells would have to be carried all the way topside to the bridge deck, where the two AA guns were situated. In the fall of 1941, we had actually held target practice and all of the guns on the ship had been fired, so, fortunately there were trained personnel who knew how to fire the guns.

On December 6th, I had Coding Duty; however, about 6 p.m. Chief Pay Clerk Forest Brown volunteered to take over my duty, so I could go home to my wife and 3½ year old son, who lived out in Kamiki. They had arrived in October. When I arrived home, I found my brother-in-law, Bruce Harrison, EM3c, USN, was there. His ship - the USS CASE - had just returned from Australia, and was tied up alongside the WHITNEY. We were discussing the present current and tense situation with Japan, when he remarked,

"If they fire our guns any more, they'll be worn out before we get to use them on the enemy!". For December 7th, we had a car trip planned to windward Oahu.

The next morning, shortly after 7:55 a.m., Bruce, who had turned on the radio, came into our room and woke us up by saying, "The Japs are bombing Pearl Harbor!" In disbelief, I replied, "It's got to be another of those drills." However, the radio reports persisted and we hurriedly dressed; in the meantime, my 3½ year old son, sensing something very wrong, turned off the radio. We said good-bye to my wife and son, got into my old 1937 Ford coupe, and headed for the Pearl Harbor Navy Yard, a distance of about twelve miles. Traffic was very heavy and progress was very slow. So my wife saw her husband and brother go off to war together!

As we approached the Navy Yard, we could see some planes, a number were dive bombing, and I distinctly remember one very large plane flying low in the vicinity of Aiea, possibly it crashed. Great clouds of smoke were visible above the Navy Yard.

When we got inside the Navy Yard gate without incident, I let Bruce out at the Enlisted Men's landing, and I proceeded to drive to the Officers' Landing, near the Officers' Club. At that time I saw no planes in the air. So, what we saw from the road was probably the tail-end of the second main attack, about 8:30 a.m. However, I found out later that Jap planes had strafed the Enlisted Mens' landing where Bruce was waiting for a boat to take him to his ship, and he fell to the ground to avoid the bullets.

What a terrible sight! All the sunken and burning ships in Battleship-Row right in front of us! The ARIZONA sunk and ablaze, the OKLAHOMA capsized, and others smoking and burning. Smoke from Ford Island, smoke from the Navy Yard!

At the landing where we waited for a boat was a beached stray Jap aerial torpedo - looked about eight feet long and possibly a foot in diameter. However, most of their aerial torpedoes had performed very well in the shallow and confined water areas of Pearl Harbor, scoring many hits on battleship row. There was also a wrecked whaleboat on the beach. I don't know how long we waited, seemed like an eternity, but finally a boat came and picked up as many officers as it could carry. On our way out we passed very close to the burning ARIZONA. I felt sick, having served on the ARIZONA from 1932 to 1934 on the Flag Allowance of Commander Battleship Division Three as a yeoman third class.

I do not recall seeing any planes in the air on our way out to the WHITNEY. One thing I distinctly remember was the bay filled with floating fixed AA cases which had been fired by the heavy cruisers that had vacated the area. Apparently, the first attack at 7:55 a.m. missed them, so they were able to get their modern AA guns into action. I boarded the WHITNEY some time after 9 a.m., hurriedly changed into uniform and went to my battle-station. I spent the whole day, and early evening there, as we off-loaded ammunition to the destroyers tied alongside.

The WHITNEY was not damaged, the only near casualty was the Chief Gunner who got the seat of his pants creased by a spent .30 caliber bullet, not enough to break the skin - hence no Purple Heart! I believe the DOBBIN received a near miss toward her stern which put the radio shack out of commission, and there may have been a few casualties.

Later on, LCDR Schaaf gave me the following information. There was a "redheaded" gunner's mate working on the .50 water-cooled on the USS CASE, alongside the WHITNEY. He saw the Jap planes and started

firing at them (no water in the barrels). The Officer-of-the-Deck called up, "Why are you firing?" Answer, "Hell, they're Japs." He may have saved the WHITNEY and her DD nest!

When General Quarters sounded on the WHITNEY, I was told that the designated gunner's mate rushed up to the Captain's Cabin, got the keys to the magazines, the ammunition handling crews follows him down the two decks to the magazines, got their live ammunition, rushed top-side, and had the two 3-inch 50 caliber AA guns firing their fixed ammunition within a few minutes after the alarm! An incredible feat, considering how long it took during drills. This remarkable and commendable feat may possibly have saved the WHITNEY and some of the other ships in the area. A number of Jap planes did head in the direction of the WHITNEY and DOBBIN, some of them passed between them, but by that time enough ships were firing so that the planes were either shot down or diverted from their targets.

So, I guess it is an untold secret that I have always felt that the two and one-half years I spent in charge of ammunition supply on the USS WHITNEY paid off, and the fast action of the ammunition handling details and gun crews possibly/probably saved the ship. Training and drill paid off in an emergency! The men knew exactly what they had to do - fast! In all the turmoil and confusion, I doubt they ever got the credit they deserved! But then, is that not what is expected of a Navy man?

I remained aboard the WHITNEY until about the last of September, 1942, making the trip to the South Pacific - without escort - first to Tongtabu and then New Caledonia. On my return flight to Pearl Harbor, our PBM lost a motor between Palmyra and Pearl Harbor, so, for some tense hours, we flew at 300 feet on one motor pulling that big, clumsy-overloaded plane.

Approaching Pearl Harbor, we saw the crash boats waiting for us, but our 18-year veteran of trans-Pacific flights made a perfect landing. Later on I found out, with good cause, PBM's were nicknamed "flying coffins". Were very lucky to make it!

From October 1942 to July 1944, I was stationed at the Aiea Naval Barracks as Small Craft Disbursing, not much more than a mile or so distant from where the WHITNEY had been anchored the previous two years. Upon my return to the United States in 1944, I received orders to the Naval Supply Depot, Clearfield, Utah.

All my experiences, as recorded herein, are from memory, and I have deliberately avoided reading any books or records about these events. I did have my memory refreshed, and missing parts filled in, when I talked with other survivors at the last convention in Honolulu.

My particular interest is the survival of the USS WHITNEY and the other ships in that general area, between Ford Island and Aiea, and I think I expounded some ideas as to why they largely escaped during the attack. They were, obviously, secondary targets, after "Battleship Row" - the "carrier" berth and the dry-docks; of course all the air stations were knocked out first.

Now I bring up what I believe to be an ORIGINAL thought!

WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF THE USS WHITNEY AND HER SISTER-TENDER, THE
USS DOBBIN HAD BEEN SUNK?

Ponder a minute! It would have been a catastrophe for DESPAC! Why?
They carried all the spare torpedoes for the destroyers. After the attack
part of their torpedo load was transferred to the SubBase.
They carried a great amount of ammunition for destroyers. If they had
been bombed, possibly the resulting explosions might possibly have been
as great as the one which sunk the ARIZONA, and - what would have
happened to the five destroyers tied up alongside?

NOTE: From about 1000 to possibly 1900 that night I spent all my time
supervising the off-loading of ammunition and provisions to destroyers.
They also were the source of supply of provisions for destroyers, in
between provisionings from a supply ship.

They also were the repair facility for the destroyer overhauls, with their
machine shops, foundries and other facilities.

FORTUNATELY, for us all, their survival allowed the destroyers to operate
under favorable conditions at that otherwise tragic time, i.e. December
7th, 1941!

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