



## **Ties to Island Paradise**

### **Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day**

Sandy beaches, turquoise-blue ocean waters, a Polynesian culture, and a year-round tropical climate have made Hawaii a coveted duty location for thousands of U.S. military personnel. I was 21 years old and married just four days when I reenlisted in the Marine Corps after being out of the Corps for six months. With orders to report to Camp H. M. Smith, Hawaii, I was stationed at the headquarters for the Pacific Marine Corps Forces on Oahu for the full three years of my reenlistment. Upon reporting I was given my first week off as a wedding present, and my new bride and I honeymooned in Waikiki. What ties us to Hawaii is not the week-long honeymoon at the beach, or that we lived there for over three years. What ties us so fondly to the island paradise is that our son and our daughter were both born on the island of Oahu.

Thirty-six years earlier and long before Hawaii became our 50th state, a 19-year old sailor named Bill Wilson experienced a more pristine and less crowded tropical paradise. He joined the Navy in September 1941 and was assigned to a ship right after boot camp that docked at Pearl Harbor about five miles from where I was stationed in 1978-81. His ship left the harbor in early December 1941 and three days later Imperial Japanese forces viciously attacked the island. Had Bill's ship still been docked in the harbor, he could have been among the casualties and just another unfamiliar name added to the list of those who perished. If he had been numbered among the fatalities of December 07, 1941, the footprints that I have left in this life would be so different, for during that six months between my enlistments, I met and married Bill's daughter, Joyce. Had Bill Wilson died at Pearl Harbor Joyce would not have been born, and without her our two children would not have been born, much less in Hawaii just a few miles from where their grandfather had been only days before the attack. With this, our ties to the island paradise have extra meaning when *we* **remember Pearl Harbor**.

Japan was flexing its military muscle long before attacking Pearl Harbor. In 1936 they signed an alliance with Germany aimed at thwarting the spread of communism.<sup>1</sup> Wanting to be the dominant power in Asia, Japan brutally attacked China in 1937 under the guise of containing communism. They were still engaged in conflict with China in September 1939 when World War II broke out in Europe upon Germany's invasion of Poland. A year later, with the war in Europe intensifying, Japan expanded its régime in Asia by occupying French Indochina (now Vietnam). Two days later, they signed another alliance with both Germany and Italy in which Japan agreed to recognize and respect the leadership of Germany and Italy in Europe, and Germany and Italy agreed to recognize and respect the leadership of Japan in Asia.<sup>2</sup> Intending to deter the United States from interfering in their wars, the three countries pledged mutual assistance should any of them be attacked by a

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<sup>1</sup> The *Anti-Comintern Pact* signed June 26, 1936

<sup>2</sup> The *Tripartite Pact*, also known as the *Berlin Pact* signed September 27, 1940

nation not already engaged in their wars. Japan was not content with deterrence, but was on a quest to expand its empire, to dominate the Pacific, and to assert itself as a world power. Japan covertly organized a coup-de-main against the United States. The attack was planned specifically for a Sunday and was designed to catch the U.S. Pacific Fleet off-guard on the island of Oahu and to cripple our navy on our own turf while our ships were moored in their berths. To successfully execute their plan, Japan needed to decimate the island airfields in order to neutralize our ability to fight back and minimize the extent of destruction. In November 1941 they dispatched six aircraft carriers with more than 400 aircraft to unleash a ruthless aerial assault on Pearl Harbor and the airfields on Oahu. Their treacherous attack evoked a declaration of war by the United States against Japan. Four days later, in accord with their pact with Japan, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States, thereby propelling us directly into the midst of World War II and not just into a war with Japan.

Many familiar names are tied to WWII—Chamberlain, Churchill, de Gaulle, Hirohito, Hitler, Mussolini, Roosevelt, Stalin, and Truman—the major world leaders during that war. We may also recognize Eisenhower, Halsey, Kimmel, MacArthur, Marshall, Nimitz, Patton, and Puller—our top generals and admirals during WWII. Other names do not roll so readily off our tongues, names like *Donald Kaup* and *Jack Colby*. Both men live in Orlando, and both men are Pearl Harbor survivors. Don, a 102-year old Navy veteran was a 24-year old Machinist Mate assigned to a repair ship that was moored at Pearl Harbor when it was attacked. *Jack*, a 96-year old Army veteran, was a 19-year old private at Schofield Barracks when it was attacked in the raid.

Honoring men like Jack helps us to keep in mind that **remembering Pearl Harbor** embraces more than Pearl Harbor itself. Pearl Harbor was center stage for the aerial assault, but the entire theater of attack included nearby Hickam Field; Ewa Marine Corps Air Station 7 miles west of Pearl Harbor; Wheeler Airfield and Schofield Barracks about 15 miles north of Pearl Harbor; Bellows Field and Kaneohe Naval Air Station, both about 20 miles east of Pearl Harbor. 2,403 were killed in the attack and 1,178 were wounded.<sup>3</sup> Our casualties on Oahu were fewer than the losses we would sustain at Guadalcanal, on the beaches of Normandy, at the battle of the Bulge, or on the sands of Iwo Jima; but, our nation's passions were profoundly stirred by the attack on Pearl Harbor because we were not part of the war when we were maliciously attacked so close to home.

December 07, 1941 is a day that lives in infamy, as expressed by then-President Roosevelt; but, in just a few years the brotherhood of Pearl Harbor survivors will be gone, as the handful who are still alive are in their 90's and older. Because children and grandchildren of those veterans still live, the attack on Pearl Harbor is not quite so remote to be just another event in history. Before Pearl Harbor does become yet another distant historic battle, and before the memories of those who served at Pearl Harbor and other bases on

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<sup>3</sup> census.gov

Oahu in December 1941 get swallowed up by Memorial Day and Veterans Day, let us **remember Pearl Harbor** by reflecting on another tie to the island paradise that is more significant to remembering the sacrifices made, the lives taken, and the carnage that temporarily turned the island paradise into a paradise lost.

His name was Franklin, a 53-year old Navy Captain whose career spanned both World Wars. His assignments during his distinguished 32-year career included serving on a gunboat, a submarine tender, two destroyers, and five battleships. Without question Franklin will be remembered most for his short-lived service on the USS Arizona, which he had taken command of only ten months prior to that fateful day in December 77 years ago. Just four weeks before that atrocious attack, Franklin wrote to his aunt about the dedication of our fighting forces at Pearl Harbor:

We are training, preparing, maneuvering, doing everything we can do to be ready. The work is intensive, continuous, and carefully planned. We never go to sea without being completely ready to move on to Singapore if need be, without further preparation. Most of our work we are not allowed to talk about off of the ship. I have spent 16 to 20 hours a day on the bridge for a week at a time, then a week of rest, then at it again.

Our eyes are constantly trained Westward, and we keep the guns ready for instant use against aircraft or submarines whenever we are at sea. We have no intention of being caught napping.<sup>4</sup>

Our military forces at Pearl Harbor trained vigorously and prepared relentlessly to be ready for possible battle *at sea*; but, as intensive as they trained, as continuous as they maneuvered, and as carefully as they planned to be ready and to not be caught napping whenever they were *at sea*, no one anticipated the unthinkable. So, when the unthinkable happened, the United States was not prepared. We were not ready for enemy forces, engaged in a war nearly 4,000 miles away, to be so audacious as to bring their war to U.S. territory and blindside our troops in their island paradise.

On December 04, 1941, true to what Franklin wrote to his aunt, three of the eight battleships moored at Pearl Harbor—the Oklahoma, the Nevada, and the Arizona—left for two days of training exercises and nighttime maneuvers. When the three battleships returned to the harbor on Saturday, December 06th, Franklin chose to stay the night on the Arizona, unaware that his decision would cost him his life. Shortly after daybreak he was killed in the surprise attack that devastated our Pacific fleet, crippled many of our naval ships, and destroyed the Arizona.

December 07, 1941 started out as a typical Sunday in paradise; but, at 07:55 a.m., while some of our servicemen were on shore leave and many of the men on the Arizona were still asleep or had just begun to stir, the thunder of Japanese planes filled the air and violently descended on Pearl Harbor. The early morning peace was shattered when 183

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<sup>4</sup> <http://military.wikia.com/wiki/>

fighter planes, torpedo planes, and bombers swarmed the harbor from the southwest and brutally attacked the unsuspecting paradise lagoon. The commander leading the assault radioed *to•ra, to•ra, to•ra* to the Japanese armada waiting 230 miles north of Oahu. The coded message meant the attack had begun and the U.S. forces were caught completely by surprise. A second wave of planes descended from the southeast to sustain the ferocious attack. For nearly two hours 353 Japanese planes strafed, torpedoed, and bombed the ships at Pearl Harbor and the airfields and other military bases on the island. Up to eight bombs hit the Arizona. One bomb was a direct hit to the bridge where Franklin raced to position himself as commander of the ship. A nearly one-ton bomb penetrated the deck and ignited the forward powder magazine below, causing the battleship to explode from within and starting a ravaging oil-fed fire. Many bodies were burned beyond recognition, but Franklin's body was not recovered because it was incinerated in the intense fire that engulfed his ship. Survivors reported seeing Franklin on the bridge before the explosions, but the only physical evidence that he was on the Arizona that morning were his Naval Academy class ring and a couple of buttons from his uniform that were found on the bridge near where he was last seen.<sup>5</sup>

1,177 of the 1,512 men serving on the USS Arizona perished, and the Arizona burned for more than two days and sank in its berth in Battleship Row in the east loch of Pearl Harbor. The Congressional Medal of Honor, our nation's highest medal given for valor in combat, was awarded to 15 sailors who were at Pearl Harbor when it was attacked. Having died in the attack, Franklin was posthumously awarded his Medal of Honor. A cousin to Franklin works with the Office of the Public Defender for the Ninth Judicial Circuit of Florida. Though a distant cousin, a cousin nonetheless; and starting today, any time you see this individual or hear the family name, you will better **remember Pearl Harbor**. Who was this Franklin? His Congressional Medal of Honor reads:

*For conspicuous devotion to duty, extraordinary courage and complete disregard of his own life during the attack on the Fleet in Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii, by Japanese forces on 7 December 1941. As commanding officer of the U.S.S. Arizona, **Captain [Franklin] Van Valkenburgh** gallantly fought his ship until the U.S.S. Arizona blew up from magazine explosions and a direct bomb hit on the bridge which resulted in the loss of his life.*<sup>6</sup>



As we look back this year on *Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day*, let us do so with a

<sup>5</sup> [usnamemorialhall.org](http://usnamemorialhall.org); [wisconsinlife.org](http://wisconsinlife.org)

<sup>6</sup> [themedalofhonor.com](http://themedalofhonor.com)

fresh perspective, for we can now see what many may not have seen before—ties to the island paradise and to Pearl Harbor, ties that make that dreadful massacre a bit more personal and not just another cold recollection of an unfamiliar battle from so long ago. So . . .

- Let us **remember Pearl Harbor**, not as the battle cry it once was, but to **remember** the 3,581 sailors, soldiers, marines, and civilians who paid the ultimate price with their lives, or who were wounded in the violent raid on that quiet Sunday morning;
- Let us **remember Pearl Harbor**, not as a call to arms to avenge our losses as it became after the attack, but to **honor** those who fought so valiantly against the aerial assault that viciously descended upon them with no warning;
- Let us **remember Pearl Harbor**, not to diminish the bravery of those who died not knowing what took their lives, but to **support** their families and the survivors who suffered physically and those who carried emotional scars and haunting memories of that horrifying nightmare;
- Let us **remember Pearl Harbor**, not to minimize the contributions of the sailors who were on shore leave or who were asleep at the time of the attack, but to **respect** their readiness to have sacrificed their lives, if needed, in defense of our country and the values that bind us together;
- Let us **remember Pearl Harbor**, not to point fingers, to lay blame, or to find fault with what went horribly wrong, but to **encourage** our present-day protectors who picked up the mantles of those who served before them, and are dedicated and determined to stand watch over our great nation; and
- Let us **remember Pearl Harbor**, not to open old wounds or to stir up animosity anew, but to **inspire** our next generation of defenders to rise up when their time comes and zealously protect and defend these United States and the freedoms we hold so dear.

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