

Interview With a Young Soldier at Hickam Field at Pearl Harbor

Bob Abate

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December 7th, 1941 - quite possibly the most monumental day of the Twentieth Century - the tipping point between potential worldwide domination and today's relatively widespread global freedoms.

This Sunday - December 7th, 2014 - marks the 73rd anniversary of that most fateful day. On these occasions, I'm keenly reminded of our World War II Combat Veterans who made this all possible. They were mostly "kids" at the time - eighteen, nineteen, twenty-year olds; many never away from home before.

Over the years, I've had the good fortune and privilege of meeting and interviewing a number of these men. One was Frank A. - an eighteen year old "kid" from New York. I would like to share part of his written remembrance of that fateful day ...

"More than a half-century later, it is not easy depicting the events of that day. The wounds and mental strain during those war years are very much part of my present being.

We lay asleep, oblivious to the world. The island was awakened by the drone of diving aircraft and the thunderous thuds of ground-pounding explosions in the nearby harbor. Our early Sunday morning quiet was shattered by spine-tingling shrieks as the first Japanese bombs streaked toward Pearl Harbor. My company was stationed at Hickam Field, next to the mess hall. We then realized that Hickam was being bombed. Initially, the attack was concentrated on the grounded aircraft to minimize opposition to the main attack.

Suddenly the explosions were closer and stronger and I heard this dive bomber. The ground shook and I knew it was close. I thought it was the Navy practicing but when we went outside our tent, the mess hall was blown apart. They had dropped a bomb inside. It took a direct hit as early-risers ate their breakfast. The force of the blast blew the top of

the building wide open and the roof's metal sheating rolled over the building's side in twisted disarray, resembling Popeye's opened spinach can.

Our first instinct was to dive for cover. The initial damage was devastating. In minutes, the airfield was totally destroyed. Suddenly, the official announcement came over the radio, "Air raid! Pearl Harbor! This is not a drill!" We just stood there. we were dumbfounded. Then, as the surviving soldiers ran across the adjacent baseball field toward their barracks, the Japanese planes strafed and bombed them. it was a total massacre. Bodies of the dead and wounded were everywhere. Parts of Hickam Field were strewn all over. Without ammunition, our rifles were useless against the flying planes fleeing by faster than a cannon ball.

I saw smoke coming up from Pearl Harbor. The battleships were parked two abreast so the outboard ships were the first targets of the low-flying torpedo planes. Hitting the outboard ships prevented the inboard ships from escaping. The USS Arizona took a direct hit and almost blew in half. Bombs penetrated the heavy plated upper decks as easily as a kid pokes holes in a cereal box top with a pencil, then exploded far below decks.

Charred bodies were everywhere. Faces that smiled earlier reading letters from home, hands that clapped the night before and legs that strolled the beaches of Waikiki were partly visible under the mass of ugly twisted steel. Men's clothing were stripped from their flesh, their shoes blown off and strewn about. In the midst of the raging fires and smoke, the cries of the wounded mingled with the moans of the dying and the stillness of the dead appalled the living. Scores of survivors were seriously wounded, many in deep shock only later to be mercifully relieved of their pain and suffering by death itself.

The devastating attack ended by 10AM. The island of Oahu and most of its military might was transformed from a quiet, subtle calm to a detonated time bomb. In just two hours, the Japanese with their precise and effective bombing had thoroughly destroyed the world's mightiest military complex. 2400 Americans lay dead. 1340 were wounded. Eighteen ships were sunk and 290 aircraft were destroyed.

The troops collected their senses and as true Americans, they assisted in saving whomever or whatever they could. Death was a part of growing up for countless young kids who became men that day. I was one of them."