

USS Arizona: The attack that changed the world

Seven decades after bombs shattered a peaceful morning in Hawaii, nine men remember the horror of that day and the 14 minutes that would come to define their lives.

A morning shattered

PEARL HARBOR, Hawaii, Dec. 7, 1941

Reveille sounded at 5:30 a.m. Sunday morning, same time as every day. But on a Sunday, the USS Arizona was slower to awaken.

The big battleship had steamed into Pearl Harbor on Friday after almost a week at sea, a week of target practice, and maneuvers with other vessels in the Pacific Fleet. A week of watching, waiting, chasing ghosts, ever on alert. On board Sunday, some of the crew dressed for liberty in Honolulu, their first time off the ship in days. The weather was warm, so the uniform of the day was white shorts and a T-shirt. The first boat ashore left early, barely seven hours after the last boat tied up the night before with stragglers racing curfew. The repair ship *Vestal* floated to the port side, tied to the Arizona. Its crew had finished odd fix-it jobs on Saturday. Supply crews had filled the oil tanks on the Arizona, which was scheduled to head out to the mainland in the coming week. A crew set up chairs for church. The men in the mess hall served breakfast. Some of the ranking officers made their way to the wardroom for coffee. No one would scrub decks or holystone the teak wood on the quarterdeck, not on Sunday. For two hours and 25 minutes on Dec. 7, 1941, the men of the Arizona went about their business aboard a fearsome battleship moored in a cramped naval port on the southern coastline of Oahu. Fifteen hundred men, rising to a new day. By the end of the day, the attack would kill more than 2,000 at Pearl Harbor. More than half the military dead were on the Arizona, 1,177 sailors and Marines, the greatest loss of life ever on a U.S. warship. Just 335 from the big battleship would survive the defining moment of that day, that lifetime.

In the years to follow, those 335 survivors would go on to new duties, new lives. They would build businesses and raise families. They would pack away and rekindle their memories. They would never be able to forget the friends they lost. Today, just nine of them remain. The youngest

is 91, the oldest just turned 100, and they sometimes struggle to assemble the precise details in their stories of that day. But they have not forgotten what happened to them in those final moments on that Sunday morning. The final moments of life as it was before — before the world changed forever.



A Hawaiian photo from before the attack.

John Anderson rose early Sunday and met his work detail on deck. The men checked off a list of chores, mostly sweeping, cleaning up. They moved to the fantail, the ship's rear deck, where a canvas awning blocked the tropical sun. A year earlier, Anderson was serving aboard the USS Ellet, a new destroyer in the Pacific Fleet guarding troop transports. The ship was in Pearl Harbor to take on supplies when Anderson encountered Eugene Sanders, the chief boatswain's mate from the Arizona.



John Anderson

John Anderson was setting up for church on the deck when the Japanese first started attacking the USS Arizona. He helped evacuate wounded sailors and was forced to abandon ship by the commanding officer, despite his pleas that he wanted to find his twin brother. He later returned to the ship but never found his brother.

"Andy, what are you doing here?" Sanders asked.

"I was transferred to the Ellet a while back," Anderson said.

Sanders seemed confused at first, then figured it out.

"Do you have a brother on the Arizona?"

Anderson's twin brother, Delbert "Jake" Anderson, had sailed on the Arizona since he enlisted three years before. John Anderson had been assigned to the Arizona twice, but each time, another assignment took him away.

"Would you like to come to the Arizona, be with your brother?" Sanders asked.

A few days later, Anderson, who was 24, packed his things and reported to the Arizona, reuniting with Jake. His experience chasing pirates in China and patrolling the Pacific on the Ellet had earned him a promotion to Boatswain's Mate 1st Class. After Anderson's crew swept the fantail deck, they pulled out chairs for church services. They finished their work and put away their cleaning equipment before heading to the mess hall for breakfast. Anderson expected he would see his brother not long after.

Below deck, Lauren Bruner was getting ready to attend church on the fantail. He had showered, shaved and dressed in crisp white shorts and a clean T-shirt.



Lauren Bruner

Lauren Bruner was one of six sailors that escaped from the USS Arizona by climbing hand over hand across a rope that had been thrown over from the repair ship Vestal. Bruner had followed his

dad into the Navy, but he probably would have signed up anyway. When he finished high school in 1938, there were no jobs. A guy needed a college degree just to pump gas in some towns. On the Arizona, Bruner scrubbed decks, learned how to sweep with the wind direction so all the dust didn't blow back in his face. After about nine months, he got a chance to train for a job as a fire controlman, one of the guys who helped operate the guns. The Navy sent him to school in Vallejo, Calif., to learn how to determine a gun's range, its trajectory, to use instruments to hit targets 20 miles out. The guns were loud and powerful. When the Arizona fired its full battery, the recoil would shove the ship 20 feet backward.

Bruner, who had just turned 21, liked Honolulu, liked the sunshine, the blue skies and, if he was being honest, the hula girls. A lot of the guys fancied a girl in port, Bruner included. He liked hanging out on the beach and blowing off steam. In recent weeks, he'd drawn shore patrol, which meant he had to bang heads among some of the guys he might have caroused with on a different night. Most of it was harmless and Bruner, like the others, worked hard when he was on the Arizona. He checked his shirt and shorts and shoes. He still had a few minutes before he had to head up top.

Sometime after 7 a.m., Donald Stratton finished breakfast in the mess hall and stood to leave.

He spied a box of oranges and figured his buddy Harl might like a few. He and Harl Nelson had been working incinerator detail in recent days. The job entailed burning the trash to ashes so there was no evidence the Arizona had passed through, no scraps of paper that an enemy could find and use. All the ships were more careful these days. They posted watches day and night while at sea, followed up on any report of suspicious activity. Another ship would see what a lookout thought was the wake from a submarine and the news ricocheted through the fleet. It was a lot to take in for a 19-year-old sailor.



Don Stratton

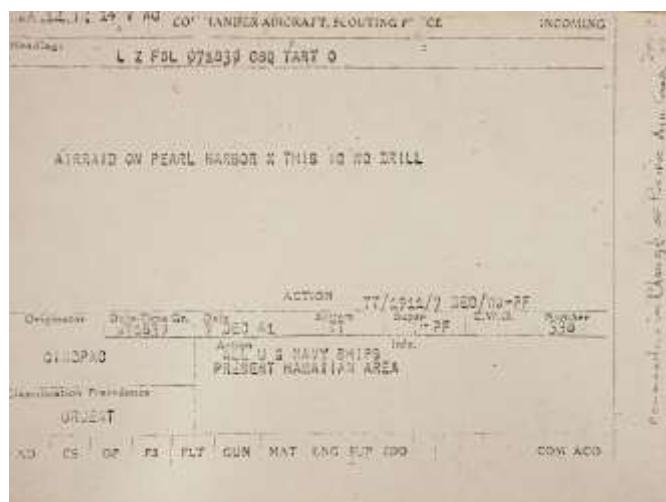
On their last cruise, there were rumors the Arizona would stay out a few extra days as a decoy for the rest of the fleet, but the ship was ordered back to Pearl Harbor to ready itself for the trip to the

mainland. Time in port meant time ashore, but little luxuries awaited. Fresh water, for one. At sea, the men were given a three-gallon bucket of water every morning to bathe, wash clothes, whatever they needed it for. Three gallons wasn't much, but it was what the ship's evaporator could produce. Stratton and Nelson had gone ashore for liberty, but Nelson had come down with a case of yellow jaundice and was in sick bay until he recovered. Outside the mess, Stratton piled oranges into his white hat and then headed for his locker in a passageway behind the No. 2 gun turret. As he started toward sick bay, he heard yelling on deck. It was a little before 8 a.m.

On the deck near the rear of the Arizona, crew members were assembling for colors, the raising of the flag. The Arizona's band, still charged up after watching the semi-finals in the fleet Battle of the Bands the night before, tuned up on the fantail. A low whine grew louder. Some of the men looked for its source. A single plane came in low, 100 feet above the ship. Its machine guns erupted. The men on deck scattered for battle stations. Lt. Cmdr. Sam Fuqua had been eating breakfast in the wardroom with some of the other officers. He heard an air raid siren. Without hesitating, he snatched the phone and ordered the deck officer to sound general quarters. He ran to the starboard side of the quarterdeck and saw the plane with the machine gun.

On its wing was the red ball, the one the sailors called the meatball. The Japanese rising sun. Fuqua turned around. A line of bomber planes approached the harbor, where seven battleships lay in a tight formation along Ford Island, a spit of land in the middle of the harbor. The California. The Maryland. The Oklahoma. The Tennessee. The West Virginia. The Arizona. The Nevada. The bombers loosed their payloads. Fuqua was knocked unconscious when one of the bombs hit. Radio operators at the naval station on nearby Ford Island sent out a frantic message:

AIR RAID ON PEARL HARBOR X
THIS IS NOT A DRILL



Japanese torpedo planes inflicted heavy damage along Battleship Row, blowing holes in the Nevada, the Utah, the California, the Maryland. The West Virginia sank quickly. The Oklahoma rolled over and sank. High-level bombers from the Japanese carriers Kaga and Hiryu, flying at just under 10,000 feet altitude, followed with 1,760-pound armor-piercing projectiles. The planes flew in a V-formation over the ships, from bow to stern.

The first to hit the Arizona, the one that knocked Lt. Cmdr. Fuqua unconscious, bounced off the faceplate of the No. 4 gun turret, toward the rear of the ship. It blasted through the deck near the captain's hatch, exploding three decks down and igniting a fire. A second bomb hit farther forward, on the port side somewhere near the anti-aircraft deck. A third struck the port side near the anti-torpedo bulkhead. At least three bombs missed the Arizona. The splash from one of those misses led many to think the Arizona took a torpedo. Two bombs hit the repair ship Vestal, tied up to the Arizona's port side, but it was able to move away during the attack. Then, at eight or nine minutes after 8 o'clock, a fourth bomb hit the Arizona. What happened then would change the lives of every man left aboard the ship.



A fireball erupts from the USS Arizona after an armor piercing bomb explodes near the ammunition storage area

Fourteen minutes

'We've got to do something!'

Anderson looked up from his breakfast tray at the crack of the first explosion. A porthole in the mess hall opened up onto Ford Island, where the Navy operated an air base and a hospital. "A bomb hit the island!" one of the mess cooks yelled. Anderson leapt from his seat. He had spent three years on Navy missions in China, chasing Japanese pirates, defending commercial ships. He knew who was out there. "My god, those sons of bitches are here," he said. He ran out onto the port side of the deck and scanned the skies. He saw the formation headed down Battleship Row. "The bastards are here," he said. He dashed for the hatch, reaching for the button to sound the alarm. A bomb landed between the Arizona and the Vestal, throwing Anderson back into the mess hall. When he recovered, he beelined it to his battle station, in the No. 4 gun turret. He ran through passageways and compartments until he reached the barbette, the big iron ring at the base of the turret.

Other crewmen took their spots and started readying the gun. The first big bomb struck the turret plate and bounced down below decks. "We've got to do something about this," Anderson yelled. He could feel the panic build. "We can't sit here and wait for the ship to go down. We've got to do something." He found the turret captain. "My brother's on the anti-aircraft batteries," he said. "They're short of help. I've got to get out of here and see if I can help. I know how to use those batteries." "Go for it," the captain said. On deck, Anderson couldn't see any of the guns firing. He tried to find his way to the anti-aircraft guns, but before he got far, the fourth bomb struck the ship. Anderson was blown off his feet.

The view along "Battleship Row."



Brunner and Stratton ran onto the deck toward the controls for anti-aircraft guns. The "director," as it was called, was an enclosed steel cube, hung on the ship's main mast one deck above the bridge, behind the No. 2 gun turret. From there they could train the 25-caliber guns on the attackers overhead. Japanese gunners continued to strafe the Arizona's deck. A bullet caught Bruner in the calf just as he started climbing the ladders.

It took about 10 men to run the gun's director: a pointer, a sight-setter, a gunnery officer, fire controlmen. There were 50 rounds of ammunition behind every gun, but the cabinets were locked because the ship was in port, so someone had to break open the doors. The crewmen finally loaded the gun. One of the gunnery officers peered through a port on the cube to help set the range and flight path of the target. Stratton, a sight setter, cranked a gauge in front of him and yelled the coordinates to the gun crew. The guns fired, but the shells burst in the air, far from the Japanese planes. They were too high for the dive bombers, but too far out of range of the high-altitude planes. Just then, the fourth bomb shot past them toward the turret. It pierced the deck and seconds later, an explosion tore through the ship's bow.

The fourth bomb struck the Arizona about nine minutes after 8 o'clock. Before then, the ship had been under attack, but resilient. The steel plates laid down all those years before in the Brooklyn shipyard were heavy, solid. The ship, still one of the mightiest afloat, was a behemoth next to the tiny airplanes buzzing overhead. The fourth bomb changed that. It pierced the forward deck near the No. 2 turret about 40 feet from the bow. It drove itself down below decks and landed near the magazines that held the ship's stores of gunpowder. The bomb detonated, and with it, the powder too. The explosion lifted the Arizona out of the water. It gutted the forward decks. The turrets and the conning tower collapsed 30 feet into the ship's hull. The forward mast and funnel tilted toward the crater. The bow sagged where it split from the rest of the hull. A fireball blew upward, engulfing the damaged masts and the fire control towers where crewmen had climbed minutes before.

Fourteen minutes after the first gunner plane interrupted the morning colors, the Arizona began to sink into Pearl Harbor. In those 14 minutes, a lifetime was at stake. Much of the country's Pacific battleship fleet was in flames. The Arizona's oil tanks, refilled the day before, would burn for three more days. The next day, as survivors began to retrieve bodies from the smoldering harbor, a man from Hyde Park, N.Y. — a man who had once, as a Navy department official, seen the first steel plates of the Arizona bolted together in a Brooklyn shipyard — would approach a microphone and seek a declaration of war. Franklin Roosevelt, the president of the United States, declared Dec. 7 the "date which will live in infamy."

As the Arizona burned, the nation would begin a march toward war in the Pacific and in Europe, too. The sailors killed aboard the Arizona and the ships around her would be but the first of more than 400,000 service members killed in the second World War. The globe would emerge from the conflict with its lines redrawn: A new superpower in Russia. The threat of nuclear weapons in warfare. A victorious America poised to take a new role in the world.



Smoke at Pearl Harbor

But before all that, there was the fireball. The Arizona shuddered from the blast of the fourth bomb. Smoke and flames climbed up the side of turret No. 2. Stratton, Bruner and the other men tried to hold on. Before they could breathe again, the air shattered in thunder and heat. The ship rose up and fell. Flames 500 feet high engulfed the tower, swallowed the men. Bruner and Stratton survived the first flash, but flames burned away their clothes and their skin. They nearly passed out from the pain and the heat. Around them, the ship's superstructure was imploding. Ladders had been blown away. The decks outside turned hot as a griddle. The ship was collapsing around them, and there was no way down.

Early Sunday, Ken Potts climbed into one of the Arizona's motor launches and took a crew to the piers on the Oahu shore. A shipment of fresh fruit and vegetables waited. Since boarding the Arizona almost two years earlier, Potts had worked as a crane operator, lifting the ship's small floatplanes out of the water after scouting or supply runs. He learned about the planes and what to look for when they flew in.



Ken Potts

When the ship was in port, Potts, a coxswain, ran motor boats fetching supplies or ferrying crewmen ashore for liberty. The four men on the boat were steering back toward the Arizona when the first torpedo bombers struck the harbor. The men scrambled to get back on their ship, climbing onto deck as strafing planes screamed overhead and the first bombers made their runs. Potts, who was all of 20, watched the hellish scene. Men were jumping into the water to escape fires, some from high on the crow's nest. A few leapt from a burning deck into flames on the harbor's oily surface. As he tried to help injured crewmen back onto the launch, Potts saw one of the ship's burly cooks. His legs had been blown off. As the word spread to abandon ship, Potts helped steer the launch over to Ford Island, where there medics and beds waited.

Lou Conter had been on the quarterdeck near the No. 3 gun turret, waiting for colors to start. He was part of the quartermaster crew, on deck after a change of watch. When the first plane attacked, he knew instantly what was happening.



Lou Conter

He saw band members drop their instruments and head for their battle stations below deck. Gunner planes strafed the deck with bullets, killing crewmen trying to reach control platforms or ammunition stores.

The forward part of the ship was on fire. Sailors tried to climb out of the flames or jump overboard. Many of them were badly burned. Some were still aflame. Lt. Cmdr. Fuqua had regained consciousness. The bombs had shattered the command bridge, leaving Fuqua the most senior officer on board. "Lay the injured on the deck until we can get them off," he yelled at Conter, who had just turned 20. As he tried to gather men for evacuation, Conter could feel the ship listing, sinking into the harbor. He opened a hatch on the starboard side near the No. 4 gun turret, looking for survivors. Four men stood in water about to cover their heads. A minute later, they would have drowned. Conter loaded men into a boat and pointed it toward the hospital on Ford Island.

Below deck, in front of a row of lockers beneath the No. 3 gun turret, Lonnie Cook felt a rumbling and froze. He had been getting ready for a day in Honolulu, had just showered and put on his shorts and t-shirt, shoving his wallet – with the \$60 he'd won in a craps game the night before – in his pocket.



Lonnie Cook

The chief turret captain burst into the passageway. "The Japs are bombing us!" he cried. Cook set off for his battle station, inside the turret gun pit, where he helped load primer along with the powder and the shell. An explosion rocked the turret, dousing the lights. The fourth bomb had exploded in the bow. Cook climbed the ladder higher, waiting for the sounds of strafing to end. Smoke began to fill the room. One of the guys in charge told the men to stuff the t-shirts into the side ports. After a few minutes, the men climbed down the side of the barbette onto the starboard quarterdeck. Cook helped pull life rafts down and into the water. One of his buddies ran up to him, tugging on him. "We've got to go!" he yelled. "No, I gotta do this," said Cook, barely 21. The buddy tried twice more, then finally jumped off the ship.

Men were staggering from the compartment that had blown up. They were burned so badly, Cook didn't recognize them. Their skin was charred, falling off their bodies. Fuqua ordered the crew to abandon ship. The ship had sunk low enough that Cook could step off the deck into the launch. Minutes later, he found his way to a bomb shelter on Ford Island.

Raymond Haerry had made two trips to shore so far Sunday morning, ferrying crewmen who had liberty for the day. He was finishing breakfast when the planes attacked. He made it to his battle station on the anti-aircraft gun battery, but there was no ammunition. When the ship was in harbor, the shells were locked up below deck. One of the gun operators sent for shells and powder, but Haerry, who had just turned 21, wondered if the anti-aircraft guns would make a difference. The range was all wrong. When the big bomb hit, Haerry felt the entire ship lift out of the water. When it fell back, Haerry was thrown off the ship, into the harbor and half-swam, half-walked onto Ford Island.

Clare Hetrick stumbled out of the forward latrine, half shaven, trying to keep his footing as the ship shuddered. He looked up and saw an airplane with the big red ball on its underside. He double-timed it to his battle station, three decks down. His job was to help send ammunition up a conveyor belt, but someone there was hollering for help. The men got five rounds on the belt when smoke started seeping into the room. "Get the hell out of here!" someone yelled. Hetrick started up the ladder. The guy in front of him wasn't moving. "Get the hell out of the way!" Hetrick said. "I can't," he man said, his voice full of pain. Hetrick, who had turned 18 in May, took a breath and pushed until the man was able to drag himself onto the deck. At the edge of the quarterdeck, Hetrick paused. He couldn't swim. He'd never passed the swimming test. The ship shook, and he saw flames. He looked down at his shoes, the ones he'd bought in Honolulu the day before. He slipped them off and set them on the deck. "I'll come back and get these later," he told himself. Then he stepped off the edge. Moments later, he was on the island.



The USS Arizona burns after being struck by an armor-piercing bomb Dec. 7.

To the island

'C'mon kid. You can do it!'

Langdell was awakened by loud noises and saw the first Japanese aircraft through the windows of the bachelor officers' quarters. The 27-year-old ensign, assigned to the Arizona early in 1941, had been detached temporarily for training and spent most of his nights on the island. He and others from the barracks ran to the shore and watched helplessly as the Japanese attack planes bombed one American ship after another. Langdell saw a bomb strike the forward part of the Arizona. An explosion blew the bow apart. If he had been on board, Langdell would have been below the No. 2 gun turret, near the powder magazine. He would be dead. Instead, there he was on the shore of Ford Island, helping lift injured sailors out of motor launches, or grasping the ones who came lurching out of the water, covered with oil. Many were burned, their skin sloughing off.

Langdell and the rest of the men guided the survivors toward the hospital. One sailor stepped onto shore and started walking. He was burned black. As he moved, the skin on his back parted and fell off. He died before he reached help. When he got to the hospital, Langdell saw two lines forming. A doctor would examine each survivor. He would send him through the first door if the man could be saved. The others were moved to the second line. Through that door, medics did the best they could do.

On the rear deck of the Arizona, Anderson tried to move injured men out of danger, under the overhang at the No. 4 gun turret. Nearby, Lt. Cmdr. Fuqua tried to fight fires, but the water system was failing. The Arizona was sinking into the harbor. A boat pulled up alongside the deck. It was the captain's gig, once one of the better motor craft on board. Now it looked like hell. It had been battered by machine gun fire and was smudge with ash and oil. But it still floated. Fuqua ordered Anderson and the others to start moving the wounded to the boat. Anderson helped as many men as he could. Fast was more critical than gentle at this point. He felt a shove from behind and turned around.

"Get off now," Fuqua said. "It's time. Abandon ship. Do you hear me? Abandon ship!"

"I'm not going," Anderson said, his voice raspy from the smoke.

"Yes, you are," Fuqua said.

"I'm not going! My brother's still here and I've got to find him."

Fuqua shoved Anderson harder, down into the boat. Anderson was trying to carry another man and couldn't fight back any longer. He rode the small craft to Ford Island, crazed with fear and desperate to find Jake. On the island, Anderson wandered up to a bunker. He saw a few guys

standing there, watching the Arizona. "My brother's still out there on the Arizona," he said. "I'm going back." He caught the eye of a sailor, another refugee from the Arizona, a boatswain's mate from Kentucky named Chester Rose. He was at least six feet tall, muscular, a member of the ship's football team. "Are you game?" Anderson asked. "There's a boat just adrift off the Nevada," Anderson said. "Let's get on it and go back to the Arizona and see if we can find anybody." "Yes," Rose said.



Small motor launches raced to and from the flaming ship in an effort to rescue survivors.



At Pearl Harbor.

On the port side control platform, time was almost up for the six men still alive. One or two men had already jumped. One or two more tried to climb down. None made it. Stratton felt his T-shirt burn. His skin melted. His hair was gone. He felt the bloody pulp of a mangled ear. He looked around, terrified. The Arizona seemed to have split. Pieces of it had plunged inward. He felt the heat from the deck sear the soles of his shoes. He looked at his charred hands. Then he looked out and saw the repair ship Vestal, which had been docked next to the Arizona. A man was about the cut the lines so the ship could move away. One of the Arizona crew, Alvin Dvorak waved and yelled. The Vestal sailor, a coxswain named Joe George, sized up the situation. As the Arizona shook again, George threw a weighted heaving line from the Vestal across to the Arizona. Stratton, Bruner and their crewmates caught it, then secured a heavier hemp line to the tower. This was it. The only way out. They had to shimmy down the rope, hand over burned hand, suspended 70 feet over a burning oil slick.

On the Vestal, a captain yelled at George to cut the rope so the repair ship could move away from the dying Arizona. George shook his head and motioned toward the tower crew. His eyes met Stratton's. "C'mon kid," he yelled. "You can do it!" Another young Seaman 1st Class, Harold Kuhn, went first. Then Stratton, then Russell Lott, a sailor from Iowa, gunner's mate Earl Riner, then Bruner, and finally Dvorak, who had spotted the escape route moments before. All six made it to the Vestal, burned, blinded by pain. Dvorak would die on Christmas Eve on a ship bound for San Francisco. Stratton and Bruner collapsed on the Vestal as the ship left the burning hulk of the mighty Arizona.



Photo from Lauren Bruner.

Anderson and Rose steered their boat back to the Arizona and climbed on board. The ship had sunk farther into the harbor. The deck felt deserted. Dead. The main mast and the tower where Anderson's brother had likely gone sat in ruins, tilting, burning. No one could be alive there. Anderson searched the rear deck and found three men who were still alive. He dragged them to where Rose waited with the boat and together, they loaded the men on board. Another wave of Japanese planes tore into the harbor, machine guns strafing the wreckage. Anderson and Rose tried to steer the boat through the gunfire, toward Hospital Point on the main shore.

The Oklahoma had rolled over. The West Virginia had sunk. Other ships were on fire. The oil-slicked harbor burned. Something hit the small craft, hard. The boat splintered and all five men were thrown into the water. Anderson managed to stay afloat. He thrashed in the water, trying to find the three injured men. They were gone. He searched for Chester Rose, the brave football player. He was gone. After what seemed like hours, Anderson made it back to Ford Island. Wet. Covered in oil. Trying not to think about Jake. The bombing continued.



Planes fly over Pearl Harbor.

"I can't stay here," he thought. "These people are bombing the hell out of everything." He headed away from the shore. He stopped at a tree. A rifle and two bandoliers of ammunition hung from a branch, where someone had abandoned them. Anderson loaded up and kept walking. A crater had opened up on the runway, where the bombers had gone after the small air station. Anderson climbed into the crater. "Let those sons of bitches come now," he said to himself. He crouched in his battlefield bunker until another sailor from the Arizona, a seaman first class named Walt

Gaskins, found Anderson and joined him. By 10:30, more than two hours after the first planes fired shots, the bombs would stop falling. But the war had begun.

Lonnie Cook, who had won a craps game the night before, slept in the airmen's bunks that night, wearing clothes dug up from around officers' quarters. In the middle of the night, a commotion woke him. It was the airmen, returning after searching for the Japanese fleet. They had found nothing.

When he landed on Ford Island, Raymond Haerry, forced to abandon the anti-aircraft battery on the Arizona, found a 50 caliber machine gun mounted in position. He fired at planes through the attack. He wanted to return to the Arizona, but it was burning furiously. For the rest of the day, he pulled bodies out of the harbor.

Clare Hetrick moved supplies to shelters on Ford Island, food, blankets, clothing. He slept on the Tennessee, still afloat in the harbor. Someone came out at dusk and asked if anyone had spent time at a shooting range. Hetrick raised his hand. He was given a machine gun. He held on to it all night.

Ken Potts stayed on Ford Island through the day. He found a Colt 45 on the ground and picked it up. It felt good. On the Arizona, the armories had been locked and Potts felt like he couldn't defend himself. Now he could.



The toppled superstructure of the USS Arizona.

A lifetime

'I cut a lot of the memory out'

Sunlight filters through a window near the front of the house in Roswell, N.M. A small white dog naps contentedly on the back of the sofa where John Anderson has retold, with the precision of a Navy man, one of the worst days of his life. He falters only when he talks about Jake, his twin brother, who could not escape the USS Arizona as it burned in Pearl Harbor. Anderson's eyes cloud as he feels the loss all over again. "The next morning," he continues, his voice steadier again, "some Marines came by and took my rifle and bandoliers and Walt's machine gun. They said Commander Geiselman—" Ellis Geiselman, the Arizona's executive officer who had seemingly survived the attack — "wanted all the survivors of the Arizona who can make it to go over to the 1010 dock. 'They're going to use you to fill out the battle-ready ships,' he told us. We were spare gear then." At the dock, Anderson said, they asked for volunteers. All of the crewmen raised their hands. "I looked at the guys and I said, 'I couldn't save my brother, but I can fix it,'" Anderson says. He stops. Recovers. That, he says, is how he wound up on the destroyer Macdonough.

Anderson has talked about the attack on the Arizona countless times over the last 73 years, often enough that the particulars — the sounds, the times, the places, the words he and others spoke — remain clear in his mind. He understands why people want to hear his story, why the attack on Pearl Harbor stands as such a pivotal moment in history. But for him it is an intensely personal story — a moment in history, yes, but also the worst day anyone could ever have. For many of the survivors, the attack stood out not as a sweeping revelation, but as a terrible tragedy, a day of losses they can never regain.

Clare Hetrick is 91, was barely 18 in December 1941. He fought through the war, started his own business, and raised a family. He lives in Las Vegas today with his wife, Myrtle. He will tell his story, but he also leaves part of it out. "I cut a lot of the memory out," he said. "It's not there." In those horrible days after, when young sailors mourned their friends and watched boats pull bodies from the water, no one was thinking about places in history. "It was a bad day," Hetrick said. "The way I look at it, I didn't do anything you wouldn't have done in the same position. I just did what came automatic."

Lou Conter left Honolulu a few weeks after the Arizona sank, took a ship to San Francisco and a train to Pensacola, Fla, where he was assigned to flight school with a buddy from the ship. "We finally talked about it three or four months later," he says in the living room of his home in Grass Valley, Calif. "I said I felt sorry for the guys who had to stay here. We didn't have time to think. We just did things automatically. It was wartime and we had to get things done."

Many barely spoke of the attack as they returned from war and tried to build a life and a family. Years would pass, decades, before Conter or Hetrick or Anderson or the other survivors would embrace the way their experience had shaped not just the world but their own lives. Most now accept that people want to hear their stories. They will speak to schools, attend reunions, wear the caps. But they still talk about the men who didn't make it back, who couldn't get married or raise children. The men lost with the Arizona. In Roswell, Anderson shuffles to the front door, tired from the talking, the remembering. He speaks softly. "Please don't write that I'm a hero," he says. "I'm no hero. I was just doing my job. I did what I had to do." [Note: To view some videos related to the attack and a photo album assembled and mailed to the family of one of those killed during the attack go to <http://www.azcentral.com/story/life/az-narratives/2014/12/04/uss-arizona-pearl-harbor-attack/19788571/>]

[Source: The Republic | Shaun McKinnon | Dc 04, 2014 ++]

