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MARINE FOR LIFE

On the eve of another Memorial Day, one local Pearl Harbor survivor retells a story that will never be forgotten

By Lael Henterly



Young Kwak

Ray Garland at the Purple Heart Memorial outside the Spokane Veterans Memorial Arena. INSET: The half-sunk, burning USS Oklahoma on Dec. 7, 1941, just as Garland would have seen it.

Ray Garland remembers sweating in the humid Hawaii air that Sunday morning. It was just before 8 am when he and a couple of fellow Marines were raising the flag over the battleship *USS Tennessee*, just as they did every morning. But it wasn't just any morning at Pearl Harbor; it was December 7, 1941, and all hell was about to break loose.

"I heard some explosions and some airplanes, so I turned around and looked back towards where I thought they were coming from," recalls Garland.

Japanese planes were dive-bombing the air station on Ford Island, raining bullets on the eight battleships moored nearby. Garland was in the Marine security detachment, and he was put to work tending to the dead and wounded on the forward part of the *Tennessee*.

"I could look over and see the *Oklahoma*, and just as I looked over there, the *Oklahoma* turned upside down," says Garland.

There were 429 killed on the *USS Oklahoma* during the attack, among 2,403 total deaths on the day that marked the start of World War II for Ray Garland and the United States.

Garland is one of the few remaining members of the Lilac City Pearl Harbor Survivors Association. As a 19-year-old from Butte, Montana, Garland had just joined the Marine Corps a few months before that fateful morning.

"I knew that the war was about to start," he says. "I looked at a *LIFE* magazine, and I seen pictures of these Marines, and I thought, 'Well, I'll try joining the Marine Corps.'"

With no recruitment office in Butte yet, it wasn't easy. Garland spotted a tiny ad in the newspaper for a temporary sign-up office in the Hotel Finlen. He showed up and was the first to enlist in the old mining town. He shipped out to Hawaii soon after.

Every soldier has a story; the Lilac City Pearl Harbor Survivors Association once had 125 members, with 125 different firsthand accounts of that day's events. According to U.S. Veterans Administration figures, there are now fewer than 900,000 surviving World War II veterans, with old age claiming nearly 500 per day. Just last month, the Lilac City group lost another member, 100-year-old George Washington "Bud" Garvin, cutting its roster to just four local survivors: Ray Garland, John "Sid" Kennedy, Charlie Boyer and Clyde Buteau.

"The real story of what happens when America goes to war will never be found in the memoirs of the officers or the politicians who planned and organized the battles," says Carol Edgemon Hipperson, the Spokane author of *Radioman: An Eyewitness Account of Pearl Harbor & World War II in the Pacific*. "It's in the memories — and the nightmares — of the young men and women who fought them."

As Garland cleared the bodies of his comrades from the deck and as the *Oklahoma* listed sideways, oil from the *USS Arizona* spread across the surface of the water and caught fire, igniting the *Tennessee*. Garland grabbed a fire hose and began fighting the flames. As he was dousing the fire, the second wave of Japanese bombers attacked.

"We opened up the hatch to go to the officers' quarters in the back, and when we was down

there we had the fire hose, and when we looked over at the bulkhead I could see flames going," says Garland. "The insulation had burned all of the electric system, and when we turned the fire hose on again... that's the last I remember about Pearl Harbor, because it knocked me down and blinded me for a couple days. I ended up in sick bay."

Garland was awarded a Purple Heart for his service at Pearl Harbor. He was patched up and stayed in the Marine Corps, serving in bomb disposal. When he got out, he joined the reserves because the pay was enough to cover his house payment; he remembers feeling sure there wouldn't be another war. Garland was busy building a business and a home when the Korean War broke out and he was called back to service. There, at the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, he suffered a gunshot wound, earning a second Purple Heart.

"Ray and the other survivors are a tremendous force of history," says Hipperson. "The past is prologue; when you study military history, you understand why the world looks like it does today."

Surviving two wounds that could have ended his life gave Ray Garland many more years. He left the military in 1952 and moved to Spokane, where he started a family and opened a carpet and drapery business on Division Street. He retired to Coeur d'Alene, where he lives with his second wife, Beverly. Even after all these years, Garland remembers it very clearly, wearing his Pearl Harbor cap as he tells his tale with the stern and deliberate demeanor of a Marine for life.

"Being in there," Garland adds, "well, you don't forget something like that." ♦

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15 IN 15

The banner features a dark blue background with a yellow diagonal stripe on the right side. On the right, there is a photograph of a modern conference room with a large table and chairs. A circular badge with a yellow border and the text '15 IN 15' is overlaid on the photo.