



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

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## U.S. Coast Guard Historic Documents

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### Editor's note:

*The following is a narrative written by Captain (then-Lieutenant) Frank Erickson, USCG (Ret.) to the Sikorsky Company about his experiences at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. He was a first-hand witness to the carnage that day as he was the Taney's aviation officer assigned, along with his aircraft, to Ford Island. He was the duty officer at Ford Island when the first wave of the Japanese attack struck.*

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I was on duty in the Administration Building at the Naval Air Station, Ford Island, Pearl Harbor on the morning of Dec. 7th, 1941. There was nothing to indicate that this morning would be any different from any other Sunday morning in the Islands. I was due to be relieved at 8 and had planned to catch the 8 o'clock boat for the Navy Yard, expecting to spend the day at Waikiki with my family.

At about 0753 the Marine color guard marched up and took post for Colors. I stepped into the office to see if the [assistant] O.D. was ready with the recording for sounding Colors on the loud speaker system. At this instant there were two heavy explosions. I ran to the door. A plane passing over 1010 dock in the Navy Yard was just releasing a torpedo. There was no mistaking the marking which looked like balls of fire on each wing. The torpedo struck the bow of the battleship moored at the berth next to the Adm. Building.

The Marine's didn't wait for Colors. The flag went right up but the tune was general quarters. All Hell had broken loose. The phone rang -- it was the captain demanding "What the Hell kind of drills are you pulling down there?"

The families of the chief petty officers whose quarters were just opposite battleship row streamed up to the Ad Building. Many of the women and children were hysterical and completely uncontrollable. In a few minutes the captain and executive officer arrived. I was relieved and left for my post in operations. I did not waste any time in getting over there as shrapnel was raining down. I didn't think I could run so fast. Every gun in the fleet had cut loose by this time. My duty station was that of assistant operations officer so I took charge of land plane control tower and the battery of machine guns which were being set up on the roof of the operations building.



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We had a grand stand view of the battle. We could see all of Ford Island and the Pearl Harbor area with the ships, the Navy Yard, Hickam, Wheeler and Eva Fields all of which were on fire. Practically all our combat planes were already lost on the ground. Most of the battleships moored along Ford Island were listing badly. The *Oklahoma* had already capsized. In the Pearl City channel the *Utah* had also disappeared from sight. The Japs kept up a heavy pounding for about an hour then the bombing stopped. We had practically nothing but utility planes left to put in to the air. During this lull a few Grumman J2F and Sikorsky JRS amphibians got out to scout for the enemy. They were armed only with Springfields, shotguns, tommy guns or anything available to throw into the ships before they took off.

They had just time to get away when the second wave of the Jap attack came. This attack was even heavier than the first. One battleship which had managed to get underway took a terrific beating as a full squadron of dive bombers worked it over. As it came opposite the seaplane ramp there was a terrific explosion. It looked as if it would go down on the spot however, the explosion proved to be the destroyer *Shaw* in dry dock. It lost the whole forward end of the ship. The battleship Nevada managed to make Waipio peninsula where it beached. The battleship *Arizona* blew up in the meantime killing over half her crew. A Jap had managed to get one bomb down her smoke stack. A destroyer rammed and sank a two-man sub in the Pearl City channel. A huge flaming oil slick drifted down along battleship row. The old accumulations of paint on the ships burned with a terrific heat. The crews of the sinking ships streamed over the side. The seriously injured were carried directly to the NAS hospital. During this attack a five hundred pound armor piercing bomb fell into the hospital patio but fortunately it buried itself to a depth of about 50 feet before it exploded. Every wall in the hospital was cracked but not a single person in the building was even injured.

The control tower did not prove to be a target, however, it could have been destroyed with one bomb. These Japs were plenty accurate with their dive bombing and strafing. Every dive looked as if it were coming our way but evidently their plans did not include our tower. Within a radius of a mile and a half 2,000 men were killed and many thousands others were wounded, most of whom were burned by the thick fuel oil covering the harbor.

The long lines of oil covering wounded men coming ashore stand out in my memory. Fortunately medical facilities were close at hand and hundreds of men were saved. If medical attention had not been close at hand the story might have been even worse. In most battles the wounded must be transported long distances usually from inaccessible places. You at Sikorsky's can be of great help in the saving of many lives. These helicopters you are building are especially suited for just this. Every one of these machines can be adapted for battle area rescue and ambulance work. It is perfectly feasible to equip these machines with a stretcher which can be lowered 25 or 30 feet in hovering flight to remove men from jungles, very high ground or the open seas where even the helicopter cannot land. Not only is it necessary to you to bend every effort to turn out these machines but your help and that of the entire nation is needed to finance such work as this necessary to help win this war. I therefore urge you to invest all that you possibly can in war bonds in support of the 4th War Loan Drive.



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