

Signalman Describes Second Pearl Harbor Disaster



FIRE BRINGS HORROR - Everyone recalls the 1941 tragedy at Pearl Harbor, but a few remember the disaster that rocked the naval base two and a half years later. Here, seven landing ship tanks were destroyed by fire. They were jammed to the railings with combat troops and civilians. The fire on one of the craft, pictured here, sends up black smoke while a fireboat tries to extinguish flames on another LST. (UPI)

noon. It shattered the LST 353, which was moored with a half dozen other vessels at Piliings about 100 yards from the beach at West Loch. The force of the blast knocked men from their feet on adjoining ships and jarred a group of other LSTs moored about 300 yards away in the anchorage and ammunition-loading area. Some carried LCTs (landing craft tanks) loaded in preparation for the 4,000-mile voyage to the Japanese stronghold of Saipan.

View Flames
Off-duty navy men joined the marines and soldiers who crowded to vantage points aboard the vessels to stare at the smoke and flames billowing from the shattered "353." I watched at first like you would watch a neighbor's house burning. Ships were side by side at their moorings and we could go from one to another. I started getting as close to shore as possible.

About 100 yards from shore I was among some non-swimmers who jumped into the water and grabbed a raft. Some got aboard it. I hung onto the side and we kicked and paddled it about 100 yards to shore.

The troops were billeted on cots almost shoulder to shoulder aboard the landing ships, and any distraction offered a break in the monotony of close quarters.

But their curiosity turned to horror as the survivors of the stricken vessel began pouring across the decks of the adjoining ships.

Bodies Scorched
Some, bleeding from jagged wounds, staggered in their efforts to reach the ship nearest to shore - and the safety of sugar cane fields which lay beyond the beach.

Others-many of whom had been working in shorts or swimming trunks - stalked stiffly by, their bodies scorched by the fierce heat of the blast.

The marines and soldiers, who had not as yet been assigned emergency stations, fled for the railings. Most of the navy men were swept up in the panic.

A handful of sailors aboard the LST 225 remained cool in the face of disaster - and proved that much of the horror that was yet to come might have been avoided.

Free Ship
They ran to their stations when the emergency alarm sounded, cut their ship free from the vessels on either side and ran her hard around away from the danger area.

Flames swept the main decks, but they were kept clear of the gasoline barrels on her bow and the ammunition in her tank deck.

It's possible that similar action on other ships might have prevented further explosions - but the vast majority of men were concerned only with self-preservation.

They fought their way to the railings and plunged into the water for the 100-yard swim to shore.

Panic Grows
At this point, the second LST was shattered by exploding ammunition. The fleeing men tumbled for cover as pieces of jagged steel rained over an area nearly 1,000 yards in diameter.

The panic increased, and the surging crowd pushed swimmers and non-swimmers alike into the water. A marine sergeant shoved his way through the mass of men, tossing reluctant non-swimmers bodily over the railing.

He knew their chances of survival were better if they reached the beach than if they remained on the ship with the threat of more blasts increasing. Some managed to hold their own in the water, but others panicked and drowned.

I saw one man in khaki fatigues scramble to the top of a large life raft to pull the pin which would topple it into the water. A navy officer, vainly attempting to restore order, pushed his way through the crowd and warned that no abandon ship order had been given.

Kicks Officer
The young man in khaki kicked the officer in the face, pulled the pin and plummeted into the water. The heavy

raft plunged down on top of him - and he never came up. His determined bid for survival had failed, but the raft gave courage to many non-swimmers, who leaped into the water and climbed aboard.

The blast which tore through the third vessel matched those which had come before it, and added to the terror. It sprayed flaming gasoline, which spread swiftly across the water overtaking swimmers before they could reach shore.

Men who had completed the swim dived four or five deep beneath a line of amphibious tanks parked on the beach and clung to each other in terror as a wide area was again ripped by jagged pieces of metal.

The frightened men now faced another moment of decision. The steep path leading upward from the beach to the cane fields was just 20 yards from the tanks. But chances of survival were slim if a man was caught by the next explosion either in that 20 yards or on the face of the embankment.

Finally, a few sprinted across the sand and scrambled up the steep path - but there was no certainty of safety among the stumps of cane which lay before them.

The field was dotted with men who had been among the first to reach the cane, but had been cut down by the flying metal of the explosions.

A marine lay on his back a few yards into the field grotesquely kicking the stumps of his legs, which had been ripped away by the flying remains of a jeep engine.

Another marine, attempting to struggle to his feet, couldn't understand why he had fallen. A sliver of metal about 18 inches long was protruding from his back.

Two men half carried and half dragged a third man through the cane stubbles. The entire calf of his leg flopped

behind him on the ground. By now, word of the disaster had spread throughout Pearl Harbor and the small farming villages in the area. Sugar workers and their families fanned out through the fields offering cigarettes, bandages, clothes and medicine to the battered survivors.

Ambulances and huge amphibious "ducks" sped back and forth along the high roads which led through the cane to the beach. Some went out of control and rolled down the steep banks.

Regardless of how desperately the men along the roads needed medical care, there was no chance of flagging down the speeding emergency vehicles. They were jammed with casualties from the beach, and any delay might cost men their lives.

Fire Spreads
Meanwhile, the fire had spread to the other group of ships moored far behind those shattered by the earlier blasts, and fire boats from Pearl Harbor had moved into the holocaust.

The fire-fighting crews displayed unbelievable courage. One boat pushed its bow right between two flaming vessels and sprayed water on both - without regard for the danger that all three might be blown to bits at any time. Another crew put a line aboard a blazing ship and towed it out of the area.

But more than seven hours after the original explosion, there was little evidence of the valiant efforts of the fire crews.

Losses Listed
Shortly after 9 p.m., another ship erupted like a Hawaiian volcano, lighting the entire disaster area. Survivors who had returned from the farm communities to watch the fiery night display fought for cover amid the coral - although well out of range of the blast.

The fires finally were brought under control the following day. But seven LSTs were destroyed, two others were burned, the merchant ship Joseph B. Francis was scarred by flames - and 407 men were dead or injured.

There were only rumors and speculation among the survivors as to what may have caused the tragedy.

Some claimed the acetylene torch of a civilian welder came into contact with explosives aboard the "353." But, there were no civilians among the dead, and it's unlikely that the welder would have survived the original blast in that case.

Others said Tokyo Rose, in her propaganda broadcasts from Tokyo, recently had mentioned that an American assault force was building up in Hawaii - and warned that it might never leave Pearl Harbor.

Not Sabotage
Official Navy Department reports describe the incident as "an explosion of undetermined origin." However, they add that the blast "was not caused by sabotage."

But there is no doubt as to the toll. The navy list shows: Killed - 27 (8 army, 11 navy and 8 marine corps).

Missing and declared dead - 100 (53 army, 21 navy and 26 marine corps).

Injured - 380 (58 army, 143 navy, 159 marine corps, 3 coast guard and 19 civilians).

And the men and ships which survived? They were hastily reorganized, reamed and refitted - and stormed ashore at Saipan on schedule 23 days later.

Dennis the Menace



Portland Crash Kills Two Men
Portland - (UPI) - Two men, including a racing driver, were killed and another racing driver was injured when a sports car struck a power pole in north Portland Wednesday night. The dead were Wilbert T. Hyde, 36, and Oran Caul, 22, both of Portland. Hyde was a racing car driver. Injured was Robert Gregg, 42, Camas, Wash., who was in fair condition at a hospital with head injuries and facial lacerations. Gregg was the 1961 Northwest sprint car champion and drove both midget and regular type racing cars here. Witnesses said the small car went out of control on a curve and slammed into the utility pole. Electric power in the immediate area was knocked out for a time. Police said all three were thrown from the car and it was not known immediately who was driving.

Children Coddled, Eisenhower Says
Indio, Calif. - (UPI) - Former President Dwight D. Eisenhower, recalling the days he sold milk door-to-door for five cents a quart, says parents "coddle their children with soft living." "Today's leaders sold newspapers and did other chores to help their parents," he said Wednesday, but today's youths grow up "in apartments or fine homes and are not called on to do even such minor chores as mowing lawns." Speaking at a Boy Scout lunch, Eisenhower called for development of "leadership qualities" and said the Boy Scouts "gives the greatest promise of doing the job."

Medford Student Gets On Seattle Honor List
Fredrich F. Burich of Medford is among 303 students on the winter quarter honor roll at Seattle University. Honor status is reserved to students who achieve a 3.3 grade point average or better.

Court Records

JUSTICE COURT
Gold Hill District
Donald Edward Kelly, violation of basic rule, \$25.
Richard Merle Ware, violation of basic rule, \$25.
David Gayle Combs, violation of basic rule, \$10.
Wayne Neal Green, disobeyed stop sign, \$10.
Robert Theodore Van Sickle, failure to dim headlights, \$7.50 suspended.
Alva Edison Mansfield, violation of basic rule, \$15.
Lawrence Milton Swearingen, no operator's license, \$5.
Kenneth Wayne Larson, violation of basic rule, \$10.
Robert Moore, no signaling device, \$15.
Carson Henry Vehrs, violation of basic rule, \$25.
Joseph Anthony Schunk, violation of basic rule, \$25.
Virginia Lucille Cruikshank, disobeyed stop sign, \$10.
Edward Mack Perkins, no operator's license, \$5.
William Doyle Pennington, improper muffler, \$10.
Fred James LaBarre Keith, excessive noise, \$10.
Larry Douglas Ownby, disobeyed stop sign, \$20.
Fred Hansen, failure to obtain Oregon operator's license, \$5.
Linda Diane Thames, no operator's license, \$5.
Terry Ernest Cooper, insufficient roadway clearance, \$10.
Douglas Norton Simmons, truck speeding, \$10.
Paul Lew Harper, violation of basic rule, \$20.
Tamora Kay Mars, four in driver's seat, \$15.
Anthony Ganino, violation of basic rule, \$10.
Kenneth Virgie Warner, truck speeding, \$10.
Martha Ester Smith, violation of basic rule, \$25.
John Willard Doyle Jr., violation of basic rule, \$10.
Martin Craville Parnell, violation of basic rule, \$25.
James Edwin Sharp, truck speeding, \$25.
William Janssen Harms, failure to operate on right side of highway, \$5.
Jacqueline Leah Gillospay, violation of basic rule, \$25.
James Raymond Underhill, violation of basic rule, \$25.
Rayvin Lester Straub, disobeyed stop sign, \$15.
Glenda Maxine Wood, violation of basic rule, \$25.
Earl Arnold Coffman, disobeyed traffic signal, \$5.
Allen Dale Shephard, violation of basic rule, \$25.
Wesley John Mendeshall, violation of basic rule, \$25.
Robert Ray Miller, no vehicle license, \$5.
Byron Raymond Griffith, disobeyed stop sign, \$10.
Robert Edward McLean, violation of basic rule, \$25.

ASHLAND MUNICIPAL COURT
Herbert ornelius Robinson, 44, Reseda, Calif., driving while under the influence of intoxicating liquor, \$200, 30-day jail sentence suspended.
Ronald Loren Whitlock, violation of basic rule, \$15.
Ken Lee Loper, violation of basic rule, \$15.
Dolores Belle Soota, disobeyed traffic signal, \$5.
Linda Dale Lorton, disobeyed traffic signal, \$5.
Michael VanBroek, illegal possession of liquor, \$25 fine suspended, 30-day curfew.
Dwayne Douglas McVay, illegal possession of liquor, \$25 fine sus-

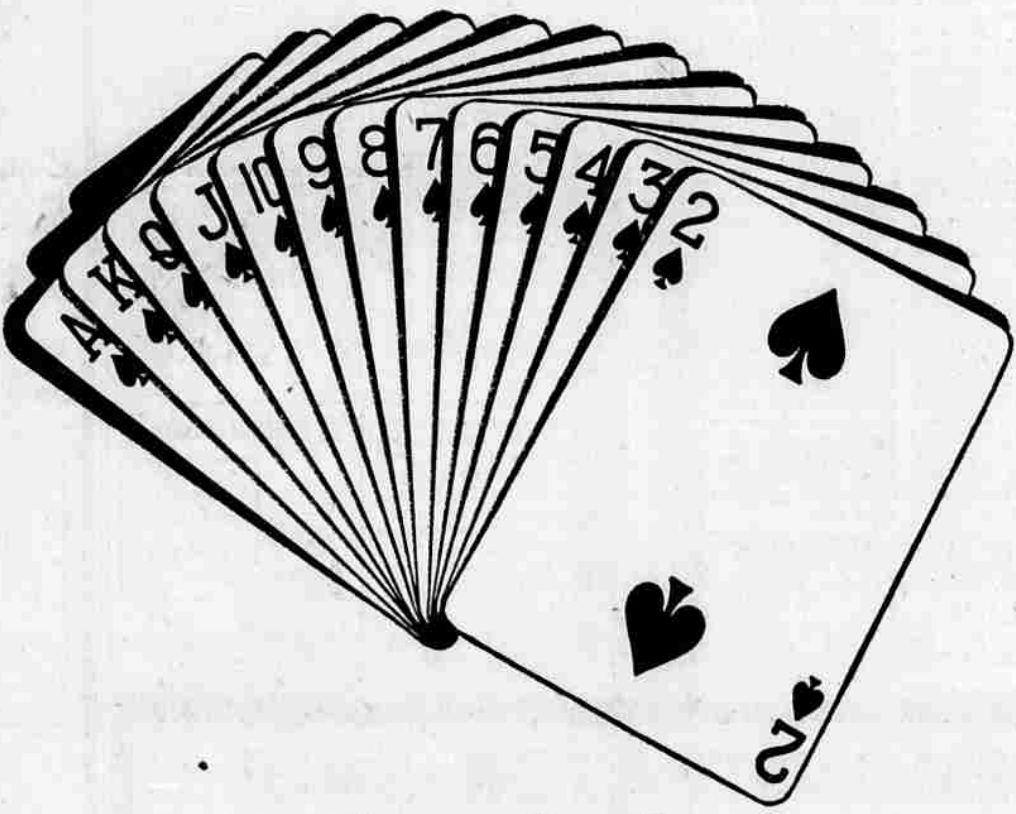
pending, 30-day curfew.
John Shelley Rogers, illegal possession of liquor, \$25 fine suspended, 30-day curfew.

CIRCUIT COURT
Beryl Juanita Bowen vs. Robert Moore Bowen, divorce decree.
Norma B. Pitman vs. Marion G. Pitman, divorce decree.
Mildred D. Parr vs. Roy B. Parr, divorce complaint.
Mary Elizabeth Fallon vs. Bucky Francis Fallon, annulment decree.

MARRIAGE LICENSE APPLICATION
Arthur George Pech, box 243, Lake Creek, and Bonnie Lee Smith, box 134, Shady Cove.

MEDFORD MUNICIPAL COURT
James Evan Dorland, disobeyed stop sign, \$10.
Mary Beth House, violation of basic rule, \$10.
Theodore Gunner Thompson, improper lane usage, \$10.
Mary Forca Jones, violation of basic rule, \$15.
Fay Harvey Unruh, violation of basic rule, \$25.
Robert Calvin Windham, excessive noise, \$15.
Charles Bryant Barnes, failure to leave information at scene of an accident, \$25.
Myrtle Lee Tyson, improper right turn, \$10.
John Elmer Frazer, disobeyed stop sign, \$10.
William Corcoran, disobeyed traffic signal, \$5.
Steve Dexter Root, violation of basic rule, \$10.
James Gordon White, violation of basic rule, \$20.
Michael Fulton Gaddis, driving wrong way on one-way street, \$25.
William Arthur Corbin, violation of basic rule, \$20.
Loretta Rose Nelson, violation of basic rule, \$20.
Lorraine Edith Learn, violation of basic rule, \$10, disobeyed traffic signal, \$5.
Leonard Talmadge Harris, disobeyed traffic signal, \$10.
Sharon Lynn Picard, violation of basic rule, \$25.
Mildred Ellen Widmer, disobeyed traffic signal, \$10.
William Rodney Speece, no operator's license, \$5.
George Leslie Watson, violation of basic rule, \$10.
Clarence Walter Strahan, disobeyed traffic signal, \$10.
Richard Mace Griffin, excessive noise, \$10.
Wallace Eugene Erickson, violation of basic rule, \$5.
Frank Spears Chapman, violation of basic rule, \$10.
Dennis Fred Traxel, improper left turn, \$10.
Samuel Gibson Walters, improper left turn, \$10.
Rosa Margaret Lack, disobeyed stop sign, \$10.
Beverly Jean Morris, violation of basic rule, \$10.
Leah Dennis Williams, disobeyed traffic signal, \$10.
Jack Everett Dunlap, violation of basic rule, \$10.

Petition Seeks to Enlarge EP Board
Eagle Point - A petition has been filed to increase the school board membership in the Eagle Point district from five to nine members. The annual election at which this proposal will be considered and a board member elected to fill the one vacancy on the existing board, will be May 6. Four people have filed for the one position, which is for a five-year term. They are Merton Bradshaw, who was appointed to serve a one-year unexpired term; Edmund S. Armitage, John E. Barton and Frank P. Hopewell.



trump hand

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MORE PEOPLE DO MORE BUSINESS THROUGH NEWSPAPERS

MEDFORD MAIL TRIBUNE



Photo: Jack Leoney