

USS Maryland underway in the Pacific Ocean

Clarence served on the 4th Division deck force, with seven divisions in all on the Maryland. He was a Gun Captain for one of the eight 5-inch, 25 caliber guns on board the ship. He received instructions from the spotters in the ship's control center and then relayed that information to the pointer.

The shell was 3-feet long and weighed 75 pounds. It traveled at 1600 feet per second and was triggered to explode its shrapnel next to the target.

Their anti-aircraft gun crew consisted of a pointer who fired the gun, a trainer, the loader, fuse setter, gun captain, hot shell man, plus about three other crewmen to supply the shells.

The 16-inch broadside guns were on the main deck and two decks up is where the 5-inch guns were located.

Some of their duties were to keep the deck clean. Even at sea they had deck duty where several times a day sweepers were required to do their cleaning in cadence. If someone broke cadence - there was a "foot right there" to make him understand.

Deck duty also included work in the dry dock, which was a messy job dealing with the barnacles. As the water level went down in the dry dock they would remove the worst part off and then started back up with wire brushes after the water was gone and hull dry. They used beech-nut tobacco in their mouths to help fight off "that dang dust."

"Remember, there's 35 feet of ship under the water and 100 feet above the water line" so there was a lot of surface to clean and paint.

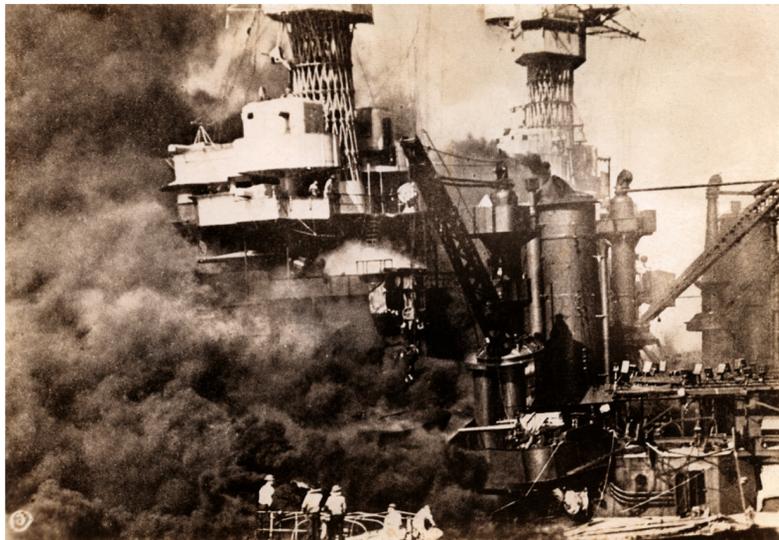


The whole fleet left Long Beach, California, and moved to Pearl Harbor in July of 1940. On their way across the Pacific Ocean they crossed the equator, and then traveled back north to Pearl Harbor.

Part of the Naval tradition is an initiation that Clarence and about 75 other new enlistees went through when the ship crossed over the Equator - "That's when I got from being a pollywog to a shellback, and that was quite an initiation too." When the ship crossed the equator, they put a barber chair and dentist chair up on the main deck. The initiates had to sit in the chair and other shipmates would take turns snipping off their hair. After this, cosmoline was smeared on their heads - "it was worse than axle grease." Next the initiates were placed in the dentist chair and the other shipmates used a 'rose gun' filled with salt water and shot it into their mouths. Finally they dumped the initiate into a tank of water where several other shipmates were waiting. The initiate was told he could leave the tank after he yelled "shellback." "When you tried to holler shellback they would dunk you under the water." Finally the initiate was allowed to get out of the tank but he was literally thrown out of that tank and onto the deck floor.

During the last stage of the initiation they had to walk between two rows of shipmates who were holding straps with handles "a kapok kind of thing." If the initiate tried to run he was hit much harder. "...it wasn't very much fun, but you had to go through it...after that you were officially a shellback."

"...a date which will live in infamy."



West Virginia burning with the Maryland in the background

Clarence had been serving almost three years when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

The Oklahoma, Arizona, and Nevada had just come back in Friday night from maneuvers - before the attack on Sunday.



Map of Battleship Row

Official reports and warnings that everyone talked about while docked at Pearl Harbor were only about sabotage.

The thinking by military officials was to keep the ships close together so it would be easier to watch for and prevent sabotage - but no one ever thought that they would be attacked by air and sea - which made all of the ships easy targets since they were in such close proximity to each other.

"We took precautions and felt we were safe."



October 6, Clarence with his map that shows the location of the US fleet during the Japanese attack

Clarence was standing in front of his locker shortly before 8:00 a.m. on Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, getting ready to go to Quarters when one of the fellows in 6B Division (same as Clarence) who was on deck duty came running down and yelled "the Japs are attacking us and this is no shit!"

He was known for telling tall tales and stretching the truth but when Clarence saw his eyes, he knew he wasn't making up a story this time.

Nearly 200 Japanese planes approached from the south, southeast, and north.

The Opana mobile radar picked up a large number of blips on the screen and it was reported to the control center. They thought that it was a large flight of B-17s due in from California that Sunday morning.

Five minutes later, at 7:55, "all hell broke loose." Pearl's 86 vessels and innumerable aircraft were sitting ducks. "We were caught completely by surprise."

Although the attack came in two phases, the actual bombing lasted less than one hour.

Clarence ran up two flights to the gun deck.

At first the firing pins were not in the guns...they were in the gun locker which is on the same deck. Because there was no warning or concern of being attacked while docked at Pearl Harbor, there was no need to have firing pins in the guns.

"On my gun, when the first shell went off, the loader ran up to the pointer and yelled 'Oh my God, my ears' and the pointer responded 'ears hell, this is your ass, get back to loading the gun so we can keep shooting.'"

Clarence and the gun crews on the Maryland had to stay at their posts and did not assist with any rescues on the other ships or in the water. After the main attack they didn't know if a second Japanese wave would be coming, and for the following days they did not let their guard down... They rotated four on and four off during this period.

Clarence noted that the nearby Neosho was never hit. It was carrying aviation fuel and if it would have been hit it would have been a disaster for the Maryland too, since it was so close.

The Nevada was the only ship that got underway but because of the damage it received it was intentionally run aground so as to not sink and block the channel in Pearl.

Four of Maryland's crew members were killed during the attack. Three by gun fire from the Japanese planes strafing the ship and one who was killed down in the hold...He was a water tender below deck and was working where the Jap bomb exploded in the water next to the hull. He had joined the Maryland the same time that Clarence did.

"A hundred-pound bomb also hit up on the bow and set the awnings afire, and that didn't do much damage."

The Japanese pilots had to fly low when they released their torpedoes and fired their guns... so low and close that Clarence remembers seeing one of the Japs shaking his fist and laughing. Clarence's gun crew fatally hit one Japanese plane and destroyed it. "That was luck. It's like aiming at a flock of geese and trying to hit just one. That's all we did. We aimed and we were lucky enough to hit one."

The Maryland, with a full complement of 1400 men, was lucky in that only one bomb penetrated the hull, at the water line. Because the other compartments were intact, the Maryland was never in danger of sinking or capsizing but it did draft forward about five feet.

The Jap bombs were 14 inch armor-piercing shells made into bombs, designed to penetrate the deck and then explode inside the hull. This is what was so devastating for the Arizona because of secondary explosions by the tons of munitions on board that blew up too.



The Maryland on the left, with the capsized Oklahoma on the right, while the West Virginia burns in the background.

The Oklahoma, which was right next to the Maryland, turned over in eleven minutes. It was hit by three torpedoes and they lost 415 men. It was tethered to the Maryland so the crew had to use axes to chop the lines loose so the Oklahoma wouldn't pull the Maryland over against it.

"The smoke burning your eyes and throat was horrible." The worst physical injury that Clarence suffered during the attack was a burned hand after touching a hot shell.

The Maryland stayed at Pearl for 30 days, but tugs pulled it out of the immediate damage area several days after the attack.

Clarence found out years later that there was a scheduled admiral's inspection on Monday on the Oklahoma, so the double bottom was opened up when the torpedoes hit allowing water to get past the second barrier which then flooded the lower compartments on that side of the ship, causing it to capsize.

Maryland's sister ship, the West Virginia was hit by nine torpedoes but it didn't turn over.

Clarence recalls that one of the US carriers sent out five fighter planes to find the Japanese fleet but had no success and had to return because they were low on fuel. As they returned, four of the five planes were accidentally shot down by friendly fire - thinking it was another Japanese attack.

Two US B-17s that were flying in from the mainland to Hawaii late in the evening after dark were also shot down by friendly fire...the unfortunate and nearly inevitable 'fog of war.'

The US military casualties at Pearl Harbor included 2403 killed and 1178 wounded. Three cruisers, three destroyers, an anti-aircraft training ship, and one minelayer were either sunk or destroyed. 188 U.S. aircraft were destroyed.