

Christmas in Infamy

March 4th, 1941, a day that I had made my best decision in my life. I had enrolled into the US Navy, in the hope to fight in the war against the Axis Powers.

The training I received was tough, but I endured it. After eight tough months of training, I finally graduated and was assigned as a gunnery officer of the USS Arizona. I was already imagining how I was going to be celebrated as a war hero as I returned home.

By late November, our ship received an order to join the Pacific fleet. We were prepared to engage into the Japanese Empire. We were to heading to Pearl Harbor of the Hawaiian Islands.

Back in the homelands, it would be snowing everywhere at this time of the year. I hated the cold and damp weather. To me, Pearl Harbor was heaven. It was always sunny; the beaches were filled with fine sand, clear water and with very attractive nurses from the local hospital.

Apart from its attractive environment, Pearl Harbor was safe for its fleet to dock there as the waters deemed too shallow for submarines to enter, let alone releasing their deadly torpedoes. The air defense was also strong, with over four-hundred warplanes to protect the islands as well as the fleet, the Pearl; in my opinion was the most impregnable navy base in the world.

6th December, 1941. It was a cool Saturday evening. I received the permission to go leave from the ship to go onshore. Together with me were some of my best friends I had met on the ship. We had a great time, and most of us were drunk, so we slept in our car instead of returning to the ship. I lay down on the backseat of the car, looking at the starry night. Deep down, my thoughts, I felt that this would probably be the most peaceful place in the world. Soon, I fell asleep.

Sunday mornings were usually the only time the whole navy at the Pearl would be at rest. However, all I could hear was the engines of planes roaring above me. Sure enough, the Admiral always wanted the Navy to be at their best performance, but surely, this was not needed, right?

I opened my eyes to find the familiar sky blue, but my nose however smelled something else... smoke. I looked at the docks, and to me horror, ships were on blaze. I woke up the others, and they all had the same expressions on their faces. I started the engine, and sped the car as fast as it could go.

The drive was not a pleasant one. The sightings of the dead and wounded sailors were everywhere, some sustained minor injuries, while the worst had body parts and limbs missing. The smell was horrible. My father was a butcher, and I smelled all

sorts of meat since I was a kid; but this smell was nothing compared to anything I smelled before. The smell of rotting bodies was so overwhelming that two of my friends in the car vomited.

We arrived at the docks, and the sight was not a pretty one. The sight of the beautiful vessels on the clear blue Hawaiian backdrop was now a sinking and listing ship billowing thick fumes of black smoke. Cries of terrorized and panicked sailors could be heard around us. It was a hellish scene, but the attacks didn't seem to have ended yet. The enemy airplanes were filling the sky, taking toll on my American brothers in the waters, and on the ground.

One plane flew close enough to the ground, so close; I could see the markings on its wings and tail --- it was the Hinomaru!

My heart dropped. I was in shock. How could these Asian barbarians have hit us so hard? I remembered that just a week ago, from the newspaper; I read that had hope for continued peace. But this --- this was just outrageous. Talking of peace while attacking us? I could not bear it anymore.

We all sprang to action, to return to our General Quarters post on the Arizona, but our hearts sank as we saw it was already sinking. I looked around and noticed a 40-millimeter "Bofor" anti-air machine gun on top of a supply ship unmanned. I told my friends, and we rushed on the ramp boarding the ship. A sailor and I positioned ourselves in the gunner seats while everyone else loaded the gun and rushed for ammo.

An airplane was closing in, apparently; the pilot noticed us. I swerved the turret and lined-up my iron-sights on the plane, finger on the trigger. Someone inserted the ammo into the gun and cried "Lock n' loaded!"

They covered their ears; I pressed the trigger, leading the plane down. Someone else told me a torpedo plane was closing in. I swerved to port-side and began to give the pilot flak. It went down in seconds as well. I scanned the skies for enemy planes, but found no new targets. The planes were pulling up into the sky and disappeared into the horizon.

The men around me looked tired, but I told them it wasn't over yet. We still has brothers in need of our help.

I looked into the harbor, and noticed a Santa Claus hat stained in blood. I sighed. I once thought this was a peaceful place, and that the Japanese was inferior to us in every aspect.

I was wrong, and it was a big lesson for me.