

Virginians at War

Pearl Harbor

Transcript

NARRATOR: Virginians have always stood at the crossroads of the fight for freedom. It is a battle in which we all reap the benefits.

WORLD WAR II: 1939-1945

NARRATOR: World War II was the defining event of the 20th Century. It involved 60 countries. Over 57 million people were killed. The nuclear age was launched, and the United States emerged as the world's most powerful nation.

World War II was fought in two major theaters of operation: the North African, Mid-Eastern, and European Theater, and to the Far East, the Asiatic-Pacific theater. World War II started in Europe in the 1930's, as the Germans and Italians overran their neighbors and expanded their rule across both Eastern and Western Europe, and North Africa.

To the Far East, Japan was expanding its empire by invading its neighbors, and then on December 7th, 1941 by attacking American military bases on Wake Island, the Philippines, and more than 4,000 miles to the east, Pearl Harbor, home of the Pacific fleet.

PEARL HARBOR

MARTIN: Well, it was a tropical paradise. I didn't know my way around very well at that time, but I do remember going to Waikiki and seeing the Royal Hawaiian hotel. I even got a shave and a haircut in the Japanese barber shop.

KRAWCZYK: The temperature is pretty stable the year round, and you could go swimming at Waikiki beach on Christmas day just as easily as you could on the 4th of July.

VOORHEES: Well, Hawaii's a great place to grow up, I think, as a kid with the beaches and the sunlight, and I had good friends. We lived in a neighborhood where I had a lot of close friends.

TEMPLE: Once your duty was done, you'd go downtown, or surfing, swimming – it was nice duty.

CARPENTER: I think as young ensigns we kind of knew someday we were going to get into war with Japan, because you remember now, in 1941... well America was, as you know, in those days were quite isolationists, so we said, "That's not our problem, it's your problem over there." They kept quoting what George Washington had said in his farewell address: "Avoid entangling alliances." So there was a great sentiment just to stay out of the war. Roosevelt was trying to do what he could, so actually, Roosevelt was hoping that the Japanese would make some move against us. I've never believed that he knew it was gonna be at eight o'clock on December 7th at Pearl Harbor.

TEMPLE: Prior to December the 7th, we went on a full-scale alert. We carried ammunition wherever we went. If we went to Honolulu, we carried our gun, we had our iron hat and our gas mask with us all the time. And on December the 5th, they decided to call that what they call the "alert off."

NUCKOLS: What I don't understand is when we went on alert, why we were called off.

DECEMBER 7th, 1941

KING: Well that morning, you know, the men on Sunday morning in the service, you kind of had a casual... you do more or less what you wanna do. A few men would get up, and some of them would go to mass, most of them would kind of lay around and be lazy on Sunday morning. Well, I was always up, and me and the 1st Sergeant was having breakfast that morning, and I think we had bacon and eggs that morning.

TEMPLE: Along about 7:30, I heard this "brr-brr." I was in a room with a boy named Art Merrick. I said, "Art?" I said, "What's that noise?" He said, "That woke me up, too!" "Brr!" He said, "Somebody's shooting!"

KRAWCZYK: Suddenly, we heard a blast. Now, that was very, very peculiar. First of all, it was Sunday. Secondly, a blast?

VOORHEES: We were sitting there eating pancakes. I was excited about going to the beach, and we could hear planes overhead.

KRAWCZYK: Looking up, I could see these planes barreling over the field with the huge, identifying Rising Sun insignias.

GOSTEL: I was on the signal tower, and it was a complete surprise to us when the planes came in. And as the planes flew by us, we looked over and saw the pilots in there were Japanese, and they had their helmets on and their goggles and everything, and they were heading for the battleships. That's what they were interested in. They headed straight for the battleships.

SASSE: I was sitting out on the quarterdeck as a chief drinking a cup of coffee when they came over. If I'd've had a .45, I could have shot down one of them torpedo planes, just coming in right at our stern. They came right in, and the old Jap' done this and when he flew by, little white scarf there flowing in the breeze. He had his canopy pushed back. When we seen them red balls... stand by, this is no drill. Man your battle stations.

MARTIN: I went to my battle station, which was the coding room. We did get a copy of that famous telegram: Air Raid, Pearl Harbor, this is no drill.

VOORHEES: So it wasn't until the phone rang – we were kind of surprised 'cause we didn't normally get a phone call Sunday morning. My father got up and answered the phone, and as my mother tells it, she says he picked up the phone and she just saw the color drain from his face, and he turned to us and said, "The Japanese are bombing Schofield barracks."

KRAWCZYK: Incredibly, and believe it or not, we realize we're at war.

THE ATTACK

MUEHLEIB: We were awakened by the sounds of bombs dropping. First, we couldn't believe it was happening. Even the experience while you were there in the middle of it, you were sort of detached from it. You almost felt like you were watching

something happen as an observer rather than as a participant. It was just so unbelievable.

KING: As far as being afraid, I was not afraid. I don't know whether I didn't have the intelligence enough to be afraid, or exactly what. At that time, we didn't know where we were going, sitting there just waiting to see what would happen next.

KRAWCZYK: We had two waves that took place. The first one, the Japanese were concentrating on the harbor. They wanted to wipe out the ships. The second wave, they were concentrating more on the airfields.

JOHNSON: Planes, you could see them coming down, three or four together – zoom – they'd fly off, the first thing you'd hear a bomb or something exploding, or it could be a torpedo or whatever.

MUEHLEIB: When the aircraft are flying over – and they weren't very high, maybe several hundred feet in the air – as they released their bombs, you could tell where the bomb was going to hit before it actually reached its destination because it travelled in a forward trajectory in the same flight path that the aircraft was going in. So you could look at the bomb being released and you could look about where it was going to hit.

KRAWCZYK: So as I ran down Hangar Avenue, trying to get away from the target area, and I looked up and a Zero was just heading right for me. That's one time I was scared. Not only scared, I was terrified.

TEMPLE: A plane pulled up in front of the hangar, he says, "I need ammunition." I looked, the guy was dressed in a tuxedo. They loaded his plane and somebody hollered, "Here they come again!" Well, I was standing on the wing, and the pilot was... he just pushed the throttle, started taking off. I dropped off the wing. He took off, came right around like that, and got the last guy in the line.

BLAND: Now, the USS *West Virginia*, I know that she had taken six torpedoes and two bomb hits, and after every round of being hit, the ship would just shake and go up and come back down and then she would... lights would go out and then you begin to hear, men begin to sort of... well, we all were scared. We didn't know what to do, and it's dark, you can't see, water's running, and you can hear men hollering and screaming. The best thing to do now's to get top-side.

TEMPLE: I could hear these popping sounds going by me, and one old sergeant said, "Boy," he says, "you were lucky." He says, "That was the bullets when they went by you. That's what you heard popping by your ear."

MUEHLEIB: You had 18, 19, 20, 21-year-olds who felt they're gonna die, and your first concern is, "Hey, I wanna live. I wanna get through this thing."

KRAWCZYK: Our reaction, I mean, what do you do in a situation like that? We did the only thing we could. We went to the supply room to arm ourselves with rifles. That was the only thing available to us. Strangely enough, the personnel there at the supply room were insisting on written permission to get the rifles in spite of what was going on.

SASSE: I went around and broke all the locks on the magazines because somebody couldn't find the keys to the magazine or ready service lockers. So I put it in there and twisted the locks and broke them off. Any other time, I'd've gotten a general court martial for doing that, but this time I didn't hear about it.

TEMPLE: I do remember that I was on a second floor looking towards Pearl Harbor when the *Arizona* blew up, and the whole island just shook, I mean just shuttered.

BLAND: The explosion from the *Arizona* stayed ringing in my ears for four, five, maybe six months. The explosion from that battle right when she exploded.

MARTIN: Well I could see the *Arizona* burning, and the *West Virginia* burning, and the *California* burning also, and all the ships sunk. And I could see the *Oglala*, which was at the dock behind us, and it capsized.

KRAWCZYK: The entire raid was for two hours. The Japanese Air Force had, in effect, 240 planes that were roaming over a comparatively compressed target, and you can see what a situation that was.

NUCKOLS: As they say, it was a sneak attack and it worked for them because there was just a lot of confusion.

KRAWCZYK: Eventually, the last planes that were there – the dive bombers, the high-level bombers, the zeros – headed out. They went overhead and they went to rejoin the carrier force to the north. And that was the end of the Pearl Harbor attack.

SASSE: Burning oil, still burning oil out there on the water. These ships were all smoking, complete devastation. I mean it's just sickening. How could this ever happen?

THE AFTERMATH

TEMPLE: But, finally everything calmed down. We began to look through the pieces of airplanes. We would find a good fuselage and then a good wing and then a good tail section, and got the idea of taking the old junk and putting it back together to make us some airplanes, 'cause we didn't have any left.

328 planes were destroyed or damaged.

KRAWCZYK: That evening, everybody's pretty jittery, naturally, with the events that took place.

MUEHLEIB: We were expecting, all that afternoon and all of that night of the 7th and the morning of the 8th, to come under attack again. It was chaotic. There was, in a sense, no communication. Each little unit sort of operated by itself, and it was the only thing you had any control over.

WEST: Scouts were posted all around the area, and every now and then they'd see a shadow and they'd fire at it. And you'd hear somebody screaming on a megaphone to "cease fire!" There was a shadow there, or somebody... they were shooting one another out there. Anything that moved in that whole yard, they were firing at it.

KRAWCZYK: Of course, it was blacked out. It was just pitch black. One of the planes, one of our own planes, wandered into the area and everything was completely still. All of a sudden, somebody got an itchy finger and they pulled the trigger, and that set everything off. It looked like the 4th of July! And that pilot, when he saw that he rammed his throttle and he got out of there. Fortunately he wasn't hit. But that was the feeling of tension, you know, everyone was really tense.

ROOSEVELT: December 7th, 1941: a date which will live in infamy. The United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.

KRAWCZYK: We were listening to the radio, and we heard President Roosevelt with his “day of infamy” speech, and a declaration of war, which is kind of ironic because we had already experienced it.

Of the 21 ships sunk or heavily damaged, 18 were returned to service.

KRAWCZYK: Well the next morning, we assembled for roll call and I think about half of my squadron wasn’t there.

VOORHEES: We were pretty much caught unawares, of course, as the world knows. I think there was fear that they were gonna land, that there was gonna be an invasion.

KRAWCZYK: It was very traumatic. I mean, we went from living a peaceful existence in a peaceful land to being attacked and running for our lives, and it happened instantly.

TEMPLE: It was awful. I mean, they had guys stacked up on the pier like cordwood, just piled one on top of the other. As they got them out of the water, they piled them up.

TURNER: My father would never wanna talk about Pearl because, if a finger was missing he’d have to be sure it was on the person before the body was shipped home. And he saw a lot of the men in the water, on fire and all. And, he said you’d go to reach for them and you’d just get their skin. And my father was a very compassionate person, but he always said those that died right away were the lucky ones. You know, as a child I always thought it was a very strange thing to say.

BLAND: I can still see those fellas that were in the water. I don’t know, I don’t know how I made it. I pray for them, because I could have been one of them, any number.

3,586 killed or wounded

TEMPLE: My good friend Jimmy Guthrie, he was a boy from Nathalie, Virginia. He was one of the first ones that was killed. He was living across the street in what we call a tent city, and a bomb hit right outside of his tent.

GUNTHER: You can still hear them, once in a while. I used to have nightmares, but not anymore. I keep thinking of the 1,170 sailors at the bottom of Pearl Harbor, in *Arizona*. There are some oil bubbles that come up every 10 seconds, and the Hawaiians say that's the warriors' tears, and that still gets to me.

CARPENTER: Admiral Yamamoto, by the way, who was the Commander in Chief for the Japanese fleet, had warned the Prime Minister of Japan before this attack, "Do not attack America. You will awaken the sleeping dragon." And that's exactly what happened. I believe that the attack on Pearl Harbor saved World War II.

KING: On December the 6th, we had a bunch of young kids. On December the 8th, we had a bunch of men. And if I were to tell a bunch of kids today that we were going to war, remember, you are fighting for your children, to protect them, to give them freedom.

*Image: ... we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain... REMEMBER
DEC. 7th!*

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