

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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A DAY OF INFAMY

On Sunday, Dec. 7, 1941 Pearl Harbor was brutally attacked by Japanese aircraft. It has now been just fifty years since that day of infamy which lives on in the memory of many older Americans. Indeed, like the Kennedy assassination, anyone who remembers Pearl Harbor, also remembers what they were doing when the news bulletin came across the air waves.

Herbert G. Humphrey of Lakeside Bluff in the Town of Carlton was stationed there and remembers first hand his experience that day. Pictured here, Herb looks over some memorabilia from his time of service in World War II.

The following is an excerpt from an Orleans County Historical Association Oral History Project done in 1982 with Lysbeth Hoffman interviewing Herb about the Pearl Harbor event. It is as follows:

"Probably 25 or 30 of us went in the mess hall and had breakfast, came out and were standing just outside the mess hall and we happened to notice that there were some planes moving towards Pearl Harbor.

L. How many miles away were you at this point from Pearl Harbor?

H. Probably in a straight line, as the crow flies, maybe two or three miles. Not that far from the harbor.

L. At this point would you have been looking across water, or a harbor or through the mountains?

H. It was flat, very level land. Of course by road it would have been further, but we weren't very far as the crow flies from the harbor at Fort Shafter. Somebody in our bunch commented at the time that those planes were flying pretty close to some A.A. fire. Of course that was not unusual at the time. The Navy might be testing out some of their guns. It was not unusual to hear fire anytime of day or night, even though it was Sunday. We started seeing some smoke. They said at 7:55 the first bomb dropped. This was probably five minutes after the first bomb dropped, about 8 A.M. We were in little, low, one story barracks and there was a fire ladder up the side. The barracks didn't need any heat or insulation, they were wide open. Three or four of us climbed up the fire ladder and were standing on the roof and were standing on the ridge pole of I Battery so we could get a little better view of the smoke and the action over towards Pearl Harbor when the whole end of E Battery disappeared. It just went up. Now there was no planes overhead so we assumed, and they said later, that probably the Navy was firing and one of their shells didn't explode at the range it was supposed to and it exploded on contact. Or somebody got nervous, which you're bound to do under those circumstances.

L. How far away were you from this E Battery at this point?

H. We were in I Battery and E Battery you know was very close. I tell you, we came off of that roof without the use of the ladder! As luck would have it our captain came down from where he lived in the heights above the camp. He was married and had a family and lived up there. And he said: "This is it." We had prepared position. Now Battery I, or the whole 64th, was the only anti-aircraft outfit and it



was stationed in and around the harbor, and we had Army prepared positions overlooking the harbor on the high points. As luck would have it, we were due to go on a three day maneuver the next day so all of our equipment, the guns, the trucks, everything we had to use on a maneuver was hooked up ready to move. It was ready to roll. The Captain says: "Get all you can of the personnel." ... By the time we got to our positions it was probably 45 minutes or so from the time of the first attack. The port was under attack for approximately two hours. There were two distinctive waves of planes. They sent half of their planes and then about an hour afterward the second half came in to "mop up". We had our guns, but we had no ammunition. In fact we didn't get ammunition for the 37 millimeters 'till about 2:30 that afternoon, and this was about 9:00 o'clock in the morning.

L. You were just standing there behind sandbags, or crouching down behind sandbags?

H. Well, we did or we didn't, how stupid could we get! We did have rifles and we did have rifle ammunition. For the old Springfield rifle, we did have those. There was probably 12 or 15 of us in the position I was at. We were too stupid to get behind sandbags, we found out later. We were standing out there in the open and the planes were passing over us at maybe 200 or 300 feet, maybe 500 feet, and we were out there with rifles banging away at them as much as we could.

L. Could you have hit a plane with a rifle?

H. We got credit for knocking a plane down that day. Now nobody will ever prove who did it. They later came around and gave the Battery, or Battalion, a citation for knocking a Jap plane down. Who did it or how it was done, I don't know, we were just firing as much as we could with the rifles."