



PEARL HARBOR SURVIVOR



By James Combs
Photography by Kimberly Ford

Sixty-four years ago this month, a sneak attack on Pearl Harbor forced the United States into World War II. Dec. 7, 1941 was a day of unforeseeable tragedy—a day that, as President Franklin D. Roosevelt put it, “will live in infamy.”

THE BOMBING left 2,403 dead, destroyed 188 planes and damaged or destroyed eight battleships. Pearl Harbor survivors such as Villages resident Edward J. Browne remember a peaceful Sunday that quickly changed into a

torrent of torpedoes, bullets and bombs as Japanese attack planes launched a surprise assault.

A native of Ohio, Edward enlisted in the U.S. Army in Jan. 1941 at age 16. He was stationed at Schofield Barracks in Oahu as a soldier in the 2nd Infantry Regiment of the 24th Infantry Division



Company D. He remembers vividly as planes flew over the barracks on their way to bomb Wheeler Air Field and the ships lined up on battleship row. Edward had just finished eating breakfast when he heard explosions, then saw Japanese aircraft strafing Schofield Barracks.

"I could see the planes and at first I thought it was the Navy doing routine flying missions," he said. "Things just seem to happen so fast. When one of the Japanese planes flew over our barracks I waved to him. That was before I realized what was happening. When I heard one of the bombs hit I assumed that a plane had crashed. Before long, sirens began going off and it became obvious that we were under attack."

Chaos soon set in. Edward remembers that the company's bugler could not blow the instrument. "A soldier in Company E had to take over the bugle and call the call to arms." He and others in his battalion proceeded to Eucalyptus Force, which was a regimental command post. There, they took up arms and set up an anti-aircraft convoy.

Although the bulk of the attack took place away from Schofield Barracks, it didn't lessen the anxiety felt by Edward and others who were stationed there. "On the way to Eucalyptus Force I remember seeing some of our P-36 planes being shot down. I was afraid. 'Here I was a young kid on the front line for the first time in my life. My mind began playing tricks on me. Eucalyptus Force was near the edge of a pineapple field, and I thought I saw one of the pineapples moving

and shot at it. Then I realized what I was doing."

Following the attack, Edward's regiment was ordered to set up an elaborate system of coastal defenses on the north side of Oahu Island. The division also engaged in amphibious training and underwent jungle warfare training. "We feared another Japanese invasion. We pretty much lived in fox holes the entire time."

Today, at age 80, he is a member of the Pearl Harbor Survivor's Association. Although the invasion took place 64 years ago, the memories of the attack are embedded in the hearts and minds of those who experienced the tragedy. "I enjoy being part of the association because we can tell tales and relate to one another," he said. "There's a lot of camaraderie."

After Pearl Harbor, Edward would fight the Japanese in the Pacific, participating in the invasion of Kawjalien Island and making an amphibious landing on Leyte. He was also a soldier in the Korean War and earned two Purple Heart medals. One of the highlights of his 27-year military career included serving in General Douglas MacArthur's honor guard in the 1950s. He escorted MacArthur's wife to football games.

He's proud to call himself a Pearl Harbor survivor. And he's even more proud to be part of what Tom Brokaw referred to as, 'The Greatest Generation.' "I do think we were the greatest generation. The attack reminds us of the resolve and belief in America's goodness. Many people sacrificed their lives because they believed so much in this country." ■

