**DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY - NAVAL HISTORY & HERITAGE COMMAND**

**Reports by Survivors of Pearl Harbor Attack**

**Source**: Wallin, Homer N. *Pearl Harbor: Why, How, Fleet Salvage and Final Appraisal*. (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1968): 297-327.  
  
Note: Some of these accounts are copies of enclosures attached to the action reports of individual ships.

**USS *Arizona***   
  
**Lieutenant Commander S. G. Fuqua wrote as follows:**  
  
I was in the ward room eating breakfast about 0755 when a short signal on the ship's air raid alarm was made. I immediately went to the phone and called the Officer-of-the-Deck to sound general quarters and then shortly thereafter ran up to the starboard side of the quarter deck to see if he had received word. On coming out of the ward room hatch on the port side, I saw a Japanese plane go by, the machine guns firing, at an altitude of about 100 feet. As I was running forward on the starboard side of the quarter deck, approximately by the starboard gangway, I was apparently knocked out by the blast of a bomb which I learned later had struck the face plate of #4 turret on the starboard side and had glanced off and gone through the deck just forward of the captain's hatch, penetrating the decks and exploding on the third deck. When I came to and got up off the deck, the ship was a mass of flames amidships on the boat deck and the deck aft was awash to about frame 90. The anti-aircraft battery and machine guns apparently were still firing at this time. Some of the *Arizona* boats had pulled clear of the oil and were lying off the stern.  
  
At this time I attempted, with the assistance of the crews of #2 and #4 turrets to put out the fire which was coming from the boat deck and which had extended to the quarter deck. There was no water on the fire mains. However, about 14 C02s were obtained that were stowed on the port side and held the flames back from the quarter deck enabling us to pick up wounded who were running down the boat deck out of the flames. I placed about 70 wounded and injured in the boats which had been picked up off the deck aft and landed them at the Ford Island landing. This was completed about 0900 or 0930. Not knowing whether the Captain or the Admiral had ever reached the bridge, I had the Captain's hatch opened up, immediately after I came to, and sent officers Ensign G. B. Lennig, USNR. and Ensign J. D. Miller, USN down to search the Captain's and Admirals cabins to see if they were there. By this time the Captain's cabin and Admiral's cabin were about waist deep in water. A search of the two cabins revealed that the Admiral and Captain were not there. Knowing that they were on board I assume that they had proceeded to the bridge. All personnel but 3 or 4 men, turrets #3 and #4, were saved.  
  
About 0900, seeing that all guns of the anti-aircraft and secondary battery were out of action and that the ship could not possibly be saved, I ordered all hands to abandon ship.  
  
From information received from other personnel on board, a bomb had struck the forecastle, just about the time the air raid siren sounded at 0755. A short interval thereafter there was a terrific explosion on the forecastle, apparently from the bomb penetrating the magazine. Approximately 30 seconds later a bomb hit the boat deck, apparently just forward of the stack, one went down the stack, and one hit the face plate of #4 turret indirectly. The commanding officer of the USS. *Vestal* stated that 2 torpedoes passed under his vessel which was secured alongside the *Arizona*, and struck the *Arizona*.  
  
The first attack occurred about 0755. I saw approximately 15 torpedo planes which had come in to the attack from the direction of the Navy Yard. These planes also strafed the ship after releasing their torpedoes. Shortly thereafter there was a dive bomber and strafing attack of about 30 planes. This attack was very determined, planes diving within 500 feet before releasing bombs, about 0900. There were about twelve planes in flight that I saw.  
  
The personnel of the anti-aircraft and machine gun batteries on the *Arizona* lived up to the best traditions of the Navy. I could hear guns firing on the ship long after the boat deck was a mass of flames. I can not single out one individual who stood out in acts of heroism above the others as all of the personnel under my supervision conducted themselves with the greatest heroism and bravery.  
  
**Radioman's Mate Third Class, G. H. Lane wrote as follows:**  
  
When the attack started on December 7, 1941, it was just before 0800 and I was on the forecastle of the USS. *Arizona*. I saw torpedo planes, with the rising sun insignia under their wings, attacking ships ahead of us. General alarm was then sounded and we were all told to seek cover. I went aft to the aviation workshop and helped wake men who were still sleeping there and closed battle ports in the optical shop. The order came for all hands not assigned to anti-aircraft batteries to go to the third deck. I started for the third deck but just then General Quarters was sounded. I came back and started for my General Quarters station which is a repair station (patrol five). We were hit aft and also in one or two other places on the ship. Word came, "Fire in the Executive Officer's Office." Hurst, Bruns, Wentzlaff, and I manned a fire hose and went on the quarterdeck to connect it and fight the fire aft on the quarterdeck where the bomb had lilt us. Lieutenant Commander Fuqua was at his post on the quarterdeck where the bomb had hit us, I was on the nozzle end of the hose and told Hurst and Bruns to turn on the water. They did, but no water came. I turned around to see if the hose had any kinks in it and at that time there was an explosion which knocked me off the ship. I was taken aboard the *Nevada* where I was brought to my senses in a casemate (no. 3). I had been in the water because I was soaked with oil. The *Nevada* was underway and I helped handle powder for the 5 inch gun. When the *Nevada* was hit in the dry dock channel, the gun was put out and the ship was afire. I helped get wounded aft and fought fire until I was choked by smoke and fumes. They sent me from the *Nevada* to the *Solace* where I was put to bed and cuts and bruises treated. I couldn't see either until my eyes were washed out and treated. I was released from the *Solace* December 10, and was sent to Receiving Barracks where Mr. Fuqua told me to rejoin the aviation unit at Ford Island. I saw no signs of fear on the ship. Everyone was surprised and pretty mad.  
 **Corporal B. C. Nightingale of the U.S. Marine Corps wrote as follows:**  
  
At approximately eight o'clock on the morning of December 7, 1941, I was leaving the breakfast table when the ship's siren for air defense sounded. Having no anti-aircraft battle station, I paid little attention to it. Suddenly I heard an explosion. I ran to the port door leading to the quarter deck and saw a bomb strike a barge of some sort alongside the *Nevada*, or in that vicinity. The marine color guard came in at this point saying we were being attacked. I could distinctly hear machine gun fire. I believe at this point our anti-aircraft battery opened up. We stood around awaiting orders of some kind. General Quarters sounded and I started for my battle station in secondary aft. As I passed through casement nine I noted the gun was manned and being trained out. The men seemed extremely calm and collected. I reached the boat deck and our anti-aircraft guns were in full action, firing very rapidly. I was about three quarters of the way to the first platform on the mast when it seemed as though a bomb struck our quarterdeck. I could hear shrapnel or fragments whistling past me. As soon as I reached the first platform, I saw Second Lieutenant Simonsen lying on his back with blood on his shirt front. I bent over him and taking him by the shoulders asked if there was anything I could do. He was dead, or so nearly so that speech was impossible. Seeing there was nothing I could do for the Lieutenant, I continued to my battle station.  
  
When I arrived in secondary aft I reported to Major Shapley that Mr. Simonson had been hit and there was nothing to be done for him. There was a lot of talking going on and I shouted for silence which came immediately. I had only been there a short time when a terrible explosion caused the ship to shake violently. I looked at the boat deck and everything seemed aflame forward of the mainmast. I reported to the Major that the ship was aflame, which was rather needless, and after looking about, the Major ordered us to leave. I was the last man to leave secondary aft because I looked around and there was no one left. I followed the Major down the port side of the tripod mast. The railings, as we ascended, were very hot and as we reached the boat deck I noted that it was torn up and burned. The bodies of the dead were thick, and badly burned men were heading for the quarterdeck, only to fall apparently dead or badly wounded. The Major and I went between No. 3 and No. 4 turret to the starboard side and found Lieutenant Commander Fuqua ordering the men over the side and assisting the wounded. He seemed exceptionally calm and the Major stopped and they talked for a moment. Charred bodies were everywhere.  
  
I made my way to the quay and started to remove my shoes when I suddenly found myself in the water. I think the concussion of a bomb threw me in. I started swimming for the pipe line which was about one hundred and fifty feet away. I was about half way when my strength gave out entirely. My clothes and shocked condition sapped my strength, and I was about to go under when Major Shapley started to swim by, and seeing my distress, grasped my shirt and told me to hang to his shoulders while be swam in. We were perhaps twenty-five feet from the pipe line when the Major's strength gave out and I saw he was floundering, so I loosened my grip on him and told him to make it alone. He stopped and grabbed me by the shirt and refused to let go. I would have drowned but for the Major. We finally reached the beach where a marine directed us to a bomb shelter, where I was given dry clothes and a place to rest.  
  
**Aviation Machinists Mate, First Class D. A. Graham wrote as follows:**  
  
On hearing the explosions and gun reports, Wentzlaff, E., A.O.M.2/c, came in saying we were being attacked and bombed by Jap planes. The air raid siren sounded, followed by the General Quarters alarm. I stepped outside the shop and started to my general quarters station on the quarterdeck, shouting "Let's go."  
  
It seemed as though the magazines forward blew up while we were hooking up the fire hose, as the noise was followed by an awful "swish' and hot air blew out of the compartments, There had been bomb hits at the first start and yellowish smoke was pouring out of the hatches from below deck. There were lots of men coming out on the quarterdeck with every stitch of clothing and shoes blown off, painfully burned and shocked. Mr. Fuqua was the senior officer on deck and set an example for the men by being unperturbed, calm, cool, and collected, exemplifying the courage and traditions of an officer under fire. It seemed like the men painfully burned, shocked, and dazed, became inspired and took things in stride, seeing Mr. Fuqua, so unconcerned about the bombing and strafing, standing on the quarterdeck. There was no "going to pieces" or "growing panicky" noticeable, and he directed the moving of the wounded and burned men who were on the quarterdeck to the motor launches and boats. He gave orders to get the life rafts on #3 barbette down, supervised the loading of the wounded and burned casualties, assisted by Ensign J. D. Miller who set a very good example for a younger officer by being cool, calm, and collected.  
  
The signal gang, quartermasters, and all hands on the bridge went up-- as the signal men were trying to put out a fire in the signal rack and grabbing signal flags out to hoist a signal, the whole bridge went up, flames enveloping and obscuring them from view as the flames shot upward twice as high as the tops. A bomb hit on the starboard side of the after 5 inch guns and anti-aircraft gun, and got most of the marine crew and anti-aircraft crews. It seemed as though one bomb hit the port after the anti-aircraft crew and came down through the casemate and Executive Officer's office.  
  
After the big explosion and "swish," the men painfully burned and wounded, dazed beyond comprehension, came out on the quarterdeck. I had to stop some of them from entering the flames later on and directed them over to the starboard side of the deck to the gangway for embarking, encouraging them to be calm.  
  
The *Vestal*, tied up alongside the port side, did not seem to get hit hard and started to get underway, so I stood by to cast off lines on the quarterdeck portside and cast off their bow lines as the Lieutenant Commander on her wanted to save the line to tie up to one of the buoys. Assisted by a seaman from #4 turret, we rendered the bow line around and cast her off. Then getting the small life raft on #3 turret barbette port side off and over the port stern, the water and oil being on deck, and the ship settling fast, we got orders to embark in the motor boat at the starboard stern quarter, Lieutenant Commander Fuqua and a few others still being aboard. We landed at BOQ landing, Ford Island. Smith, B.M.2c, USN, boat coxswain, made many trips for wounded and burned men being delivered by Lieutenant Commander Fuqua, still on board.  
  
Courage and performance of all hands was of the highest order imaginable, especially being handicapped by adverse conditions and shipmates being blown up alongside them. There was no disorder nor tendency to run around in confusion. The coolness and calm manner of Lieutenant Commander Fuqua and Ensign J. D. Miller instilled confidence in the surviving crew.

**USS *West Virginia***   
  
**Lieutenant Commander T. T. Beattie wrote as follows:**   
  
About five minutes to eight I was in the wardroom just finishing breakfast, when word came over the loud speaker from the officer-of-the-deck, "away fire and rescue party." This was followed immediately by a second announcement over the loud speaker, "Japanese are attacking, all hands General Quarters," and the general alarm was rung.   
  
I heard several dull explosions coming from other battleships. Immediately I left the wardroom and ran up the starboard passageway to the bridge. The Captain was just ahead of me and proceeding in the same direction.   
  
At this time the ship listed at least five or six degrees and was steadily listing more to port. The Captain and I went to the conning tower, our battle stations, and at this time dive bombing attacks started to take place and numerous explosions were felt throughout the ship. Upon testing our communications with central station and to the guns we found they were disrupted. I suggested to the Captain as long as no communications were in the battle conning tower that we leave there and attempt to establish messenger communication and try to save the ship. We went out on the starboard side of the bridge discussing what to do. During all this time extremely heavy bombing and strafing attacks occurred. The ship was constantly shaken by bomb hits.   
  
The Captain doubled up with a groan and stated that he had been wounded. I saw that be had been hit in the stomach probably by a large piece of shrapnel and was very seriously wounded. He then sank to the deck and I loosened his collar. I then sent a messenger for a pharmacists mate to assist the Captain.   
  
Just then the USS *Arizona's* forward magazines blew up with a tremendous explosion and large sheets of flame shot skyward, and I began to wonder about our own magazines and whether they were being flooded. I posted a man with the Captain and went down to the forecastle where a number of the crew and officers had gathered. I got hold of a chief turret captain to check immediately on the magazines and to flood them if they were not flooded at this time. Large sheets of flame and several fires started aft. Burning fuel oil from the USS *Arizona* floated down on the stern of the ship. Just then the gunnery officer, Lieutenant Commander Berthold, came aboard and I asked him to try to flood the forward magazines. Shortly thereafter I was informed that the after magazines were completely flooded but that they were unable to flood the forward magazines as the water was now almost to the main deck.  
  
At about this time a large oil fire swept from the USS *Arizona* down the port side of the USS *West Virginia*. We had no water on board as the fire mains and machinery were out of commission and we were unable to do any fire fighting at all. I got into a motor launch to go to the stern of the ship to investigate the fire. The smoke was so heavy that I could not see aft of the bridge. As I got into the boat a sheet of flame swept on top of us and we barely managed to get free of the fire. I then had the boat take me aft. The burning oil on the water swept by the ship and I managed to return to the quarterdeck. I realized then that the ship was lost.  
  
The attack lasted approximately thirty minutes. We were able to fire all our ready ammunition on the anti-aircraft batteries, but were unable to replenish it as the ship was flooded. I then told the men on the quarterdeck, with the exception of a small working party, to leave the ship. I believe at this time that all the wounded had been taken off the ship and it was extremely dangerous for anyone to remain aboard; that nothing could be done to save the ship and shells from the secondary batteries were constantly exploding due to the intensive heat of the fire midships.  
  
The conduct of the crew and officers was outstanding. There was no confusion and every man and officer did his duty as well as he was able under the conditions.

**Lieutenant Ruth Erickson, NC, USN**

**Oral History of The Pearl Harbor Attack, 7 December 1941**

**Excerpt from Oral History of LT Ruth Erickson, NC (Nurse Corps), USN. LT Erickson was a nurse at Naval Hospital Pearl Harbor during the attack on 7 December 1941.**

[**Source:** Oral history provided courtesy of Historian, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery]

After the maneuvers were over, we were assigned to an R & R (rest and relaxation) port of Charlotte Amalie, Virgin Islands. After 5 lovely days we followed the fleet, supposedly to New York to assist in the opening of the World's Fair of April 1939.

Upon reaching Norfolk, VA, everything changed. It seemed Japan was "rattling the saber." Thus, all ships were ordered to refuel, take on provisions, and immediately return to the West Coast.

When we reached the Panama Canal, the locks operated around the clock to get the ships through. The [*Relief*](http://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/r/relief-vi.html) (AH-1) was the last ship and we remained on the Pacific side for 2 to 3 days and then continued to our home port, San Pedro, CA.

When we arrived we remained in port until February 1940. In late summer of 1939 we learned that spring fleet maneuvers would be in Hawaii, off the coast of Maui. Further, I would be detached to report to the Naval Hospital, Pearl Harbor, T.H. when maneuvers were completed. The orders were effective on 8 May 1940.

Tropical duty was another segment in my life's adventure! On this same date I reported to the hospital command in which CAPT Reynolds Hayden was the commanding officer. Miss Myrtle Kinsey was the chief of nursing services with a staff of eight nurses. I was also pleased to meet up with Miss Winnie Gibson once again, the operating room supervisor.

We nurses had regular ward assignments and went on duty at 8 a.m. Each had a nice room in the nurses' quarters. We were a bit spoiled; along with iced tea, fresh pineapple was always available.

We were off at noon each day while one nurse covered units until relieved at 3 p.m. In turn, the p.m. nurse was relieved at 10 p.m. The night nurse's hours were 10 p.m. to 8 a.m.

One month I'd have a medical ward and the next month rotated to a surgical ward. Again, I didn't have any operating room duties here. The fleet population was relatively young and healthy. We did have quite an outbreak of "cat [catarrhal] fever" with flu-like symptoms. This was the only pressure period we had until the war started.

**What was off-duty like?**  
Cars were few and far between, but two nurses had them. Many aviators were attached to Ford Island. Thus, there was dating. We had the tennis courts, swimming at the beach, and picnics. The large hotel at Waikiki was the Royal Hawaiian, where we enjoyed an occasional beautiful evening and dancing under starlit skies to lovely Hawaiian melodies.

**And then it all ended rather quickly.**  
Yes, it did. A big drydock in the area was destined to go right through the area where the nurses' quarters stood. We had vacated the nurses' quarters about 1 week prior to the attack. We lived in temporary quarters directly across the street from the hospital, a one-story building in the shape of an E. The permanent nurses' quarters had been stripped and the shell of the building was to be razed in the next few days.  
By now, the nursing staff had been increased to 30 and an appropriate number of doctors and corpsmen had been added. The Pacific Fleet had moved their base of operations from San Diego to Pearl Harbor. With this massive expansion, there went our tropical hours! The hospital now operated at full capacity.

**Were you and your colleagues beginning to feel that war was coming?**  
No. We didn't know what to think. I had worked the afternoon duty on Saturday, December 6th from 3 p.m. until 10 p.m. with Sunday to be my day off.  
Two or three of us were sitting in the dining room Sunday morning having a late breakfast and talking over coffee. Suddenly we heard planes roaring overhead and we said, "The `fly boys' are really busy at Ford Island this morning." The island was directly across the channel from the hospital. We didn't think too much about it since the reserves were often there for weekend training. We no sooner got those words out when we started to hear noises that were foreign to us.  
I leaped out of my chair and dashed to the nearest window in the corridor. Right then there was a plane flying directly over the top of our quarters, a one-story structure. The rising sun under the wing of the plane denoted the enemy. Had I known the pilot, one could almost see his features around his goggles. He was obviously saving his ammunition for the ships. Just down the row, all the ships were sitting there--the [battleships] *California* (BB-44), the *Arizona*(BB-39), the *Oklahoma*(BB-37), and others.  
My heart was racing, the telephone was ringing, the chief nurse, Gertrude Arnest, was saying, "Girls, get into your uniforms at once, This is the real thing!"  
I was in my room by that time changing into uniform. It was getting dusky, almost like evening. Smoke was rising from burning ships.  
I dashed across the street, through a shrapnel shower, got into the lanai and just stood still for a second as were a couple of doctors. I felt like I were frozen to the ground, but it was only a split second. I ran to the orthopedic dressing room but it was locked. A corpsmen ran to the OD's [Officer-of-the-Day's] desk for the keys. It seemed like an eternity before he returned and the room was opened. We drew water into every container we could find and set up the instrument boiler. Fortunately, we still had electricity and water. Dr. [CDR Clyde W.] Brunson, the chief of medicine was making sick call when the bombing started. When he was finished, he was to play golf...a phrase never to be uttered again.  
The first patient came into our dressing room at 8:25 a.m. with a large opening in his abdomen and bleeding profusely. They started an intravenous and transfusion. I can still see the tremor of Dr. Brunson's hand as he picked up the needle. Everyone was terrified. The patient died within the hour.  
Then the burned patients streamed in. The USS *Nevada* (BB-36) had managed some steam and attempted to get out of the channel. They were unable to make it and went aground on Hospital Point right near the hospital. There was heavy oil on the water and the men dived off the ship and swam through these waters to Hospital Point, not too great a distance, but when one is burned... How they ever managed, I'll never know.  
The tropical dress at the time was white t-shirts and shorts. The burns began where the pants ended. Bared arms and faces were plentiful.  
Personnel retrieved a supply of flit guns from stock. We filled these with tannic acid to spray burned bodies. Then we gave these gravely injured patients sedatives for their intense pain.  
Orthopedic patients were eased out of their beds with no time for linen changes as an unending stream of burn patients continued until mid afternoon. A doctor, who several days before had renal surgery and was still convalescing, got out of his bed and began to assist the other doctors.

**Do you recall the Japanese plane that was shot down and crashed into the tennis court?**  
Yes, the laboratory was next to the tennis court. The plane sheared off a corner of the laboratory and a number of the laboratory animals, rats and guinea pigs, were destroyed. Dr. Shaver [LTJG John S.], the chief pathologist, was very upset.  
About 12 noon the galley personnel came around with sandwiches and cold drinks; we ate on the run. About 2 o'clock the chief nurse was making rounds to check on all the units and arrange relief schedules.  
I was relieved around 4 p.m. and went over to the nurses' quarters where everything was intact. I freshened up, had something to eat, and went back on duty at 8 p.m. I was scheduled to report to a surgical unit. By now it was dark and we worked with flashlights. The maintenance people and anyone else who could manage a hammer and nails were putting up black drapes or black paper to seal the crevices against any light that might stream to the outside.  
About 10 or 11 o'clock, there were planes overhead. I really hadn't felt frightened until this particular time. My knees were knocking together and the patients were calling, "Nurse, nurse!" The other nurse and I went to them, held their hands a few moments, and then went onto others.  
The priest was a very busy man. The noise ended very quickly and the word got around that these were our own planes.

**What do you remember when daylight came?**I worked until midnight on that ward and then was directed to go down to the basement level in the main hospital building. Here the dependents--the women and children--the families of the doctors and other staff officers were placed for the night. There were ample blankets and pillows. We lay body by body along the walls of the basement. The children were frightened and the adults tense. It was not a very restful night for anyone.  
Everyone was relieved to see daylight. At 6 a.m. I returned to the quarters, showered, had breakfast, and reported to a medical ward. There were more burn cases and I spent a week there.

**What could you see when you looked over toward Ford Island?**I really couldn't see too much from the hospital because of the heavy smoke. Perhaps at a higher level one could have had a better view.  
On the evening of 17 December, the chief nurse told me I was being ordered to temporary duty and I was to go to the quarters, pack a bag, and be ready to leave at noon. When I asked where I was going, she said she had no idea. The commanding officer ordered her to obtain three nurses and they were to be in uniform. In that era we had no outdoor uniforms. Thus it would be the regular white ward uniforms.  
And so in our ward uniforms, capes, blue felt hats, and blue sweaters, Lauretta Eno, Catherine Richardson, and I waited for a car and driver to pick us up at the quarters. When he arrived and inquired of our destination, we still had no idea! The OD's desk had our priority orders to go to one of the piers in Honolulu. We were to go aboard the SS [steamship] *President Coolidge* and prepare to receive patients. We calculated supplies for a 10-day period.  
We three nurses and a number of corpsmen from the hospital were assigned to the SS *Coolidge*.  
Eight volunteer nurses from the Queens Hospital in Honolulu were attached to the Army transport at the next pier, USAT [U.S. Army transport] *Scott*, a smaller ship.  
The naval hospital brought our supplies the following day, the 18th, and we worked late into the evening. We received our patients from the hospital on the 19th, the*Coolidge* with 125 patients and the *Scott* with 55.

**Were these the most critically injured patients?**The command decided that patients who would need more than 3 months treatment should be transferred. Some were very bad and probably should not have been moved. There were many passengers already aboard the ship, missionaries and countless others who had been picked up in the Orient. Two Navy doctors on the passenger list from the Philippines were placed on temporary duty and they were pleased to be of help.  
Catherine Richardson worked 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. I had the 4 p.m. to midnight, and Lauretta Eno worked midnight to 8 a.m. Everyone was very apprehensive. The ship traveled without exterior lights but there was ample light inside.

**You left at night?**Yes, we left in the late afternoon of the 19th. There were 8 or 10 ships in the convoy. It was quite chilly the next day; I later learned that we had gone fairly far north instead of directly across. The rumors were rampant that a submarine was seen out this porthole in some other direction. I never get seasick and enjoy a bit of heavy seas, but this was different! Ventilation was limited by reason of sealed ports and only added to gastric misery. I was squared about very soon.  
The night before we got into port, we lost a patient, an older man, perhaps a chief. He had been badly burned, He was losing intravenous fluids faster than they could be replaced. Our destination became San Francisco with 124 patients and one deceased.  
We arrived at 8 a.m. on Christmas Day! Two ferries were waiting there for us with cots aboard and ambulances from the naval hospital at Mare Island and nearby civilian hospitals. The Red Cross was a cheerful sight with donuts and coffee.  
Our arrival was kept very quiet. Heretofore, all ship's movements were published in the daily paper but since the war had started, this had ceased. I don't recall that other ships in the convoy came in with us except for the *Scott*. We and the *Scott* were the only ships to enter the port. The convoy probably slipped away.  
The patients were very happy to be home and so were we all. The ambulances went on ahead to Mare Island. By the time we had everyone settled on the two ferries, it was close to noon. We arrived at Mare Island at 4:30 p.m. and helped get the patients into the respective wards.  
While at Mare Island, a doctor said to me, "For God's sake, Ruth, what's happened out there? We don't know a thing." He had been on the USS *Arizona* (BB-39) and was detached only a few months prior to the attack. We stayed in the nurses' quarters that night.

**Captain Lacouture, USN**

**Oral History of The Pearl Harbor Attack, 7 December 1941**

**Interviewer:**Okay. You mentioned you're Assistant Engineer on the USS [*Blue*](http://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/b/blue-i.html)*.* You're dealing with a chief and enlisted. How did your leadership skills come into play here?

**Lacouture:** Well, I found that you had to really trust your chief petty officers to tell you and advise you on all the intricacies of equipment and everything you're working on. And you supported them in any problems they had. I tried to get involved at the level down there with the chiefs and find out what their problems were, and so forth.

Communications Officer was mainly the question of getting the word on what was happening to the captain and responding to his wishes getting whatever he wanted out.

First Lieutenant was mainly keeping the topside cleaned up, and so forth and so on. And Gunnery Officer was making sure your directors and your equipment and everything worked from the gunnery point of view.

And of course, in addition to those deals, you had to stand the deck watch, usually four hours every day, and if you had the midwatch, you'd have been up working until the watch started and then you'd go from then until four o'clock, and fortunately got good coffee to keep yourself awake.

So things progressed well on the *Blue*, and with my social life, since I met Bam Sperry, I met several other gals. Come the evening before Pearl Harbor, we would moor usually in a joint mooring with three or four other destroyers. We would be on the east side of Ford Island and the battleships would line up on the south side of Ford Island, and then they only had one carrier based at the time there and that was I think the [USS] [*Enterprise*](http://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/e/enterprise-cv-6-vii.html) [CV-6] was the main carrier out there at the time.

The night before Pearl Harbor, I was invited to a party with all the top admirals at the Royal Hawaiian, and Hilo Hattie put on her act and did her dancing and sang her songs, and we had a great time.

The mother of a gal that I was with said, "Well, now no need your going back to the ship tonight. Come back and stay at my place. We've got plenty of extra rooms."

So I went out there and about seven o'clock in the morning, she came in and started shaking me. "Wake up, wake up! The Japanese are attacking Pearl Harbor!"

I said, "Are you crazy? Go away, I'm sleepy." She finally convinced me, so I jumped in my car and headed towards Pearl, and the roads were almost vacant. There were almost no cars on the road, and I go down to the landing, the officers' landing there, and the gig was waiting there for a captain of one of the other destroyers, which was just going out.

I couldn't believe itall the battleships are overturned and all smoking, and all I could think of was all my [Naval Academy] classmates and everything, and what had happened to them. The commander who was captain of one of the other destroyers waiting there, his gig was ready. He said, "Jump in," as the ship came by. It had just gotten underway, and as they went down the channel, the Japanese second attack came in so we started shooting at them and they tried to sink the [USS] *Nevada* [BB-36], the battleship that had gotten underway.

**Interviewer:***Nevada* had, yes.

**Lacouture:** And they were trying to sink it in the channel. I guess one of the young ensigns ran it aground to keep it from sinking in the channel. And at the time they were bombing I think it was the [USS] *Pennsylvania*[BB-38] that was in dry dock there.

And we shot down, oh, at least one of the airplanes, and as we went by, all the planes, the seaplanes and the hangers and everything on Ford Island were burning. Just as we got out to the entrance of the harbor there, we did manage to sink a little Japanese miniature submarine.

So we cruised around out there and I had the watch at about four or four-thirty in the morning, five o'clock just as dawn was breaking, and all of a sudden I see a big shape of a carrier through my goggles, sort of off Barbers Point, and I immediately go to general quarters, man the guns, man the torpedo tubes, get ready to fire torpedoes, and about that time the carrier puts a searchlight up and shows the American flag flying. That was the *Enterprise* just as I was about to launch torpedoes. It had been delivering planes to Wake Island and on its way home the cruiser with it had had propeller problems. They had to send a diving team down to sort of fix the propeller; otherwise the*Enterprise* would have been at its dock there and would have been sunk by the Japanese. Because they came in and I think they had, was it the [USS] *Utah* [AG-16] or some training ship was there and they splintered it to smithereens, just because they were diving at a target location without wondering just what it was.

And then, of course, the *Enterprise* launched her planes and about a third of them got shot down, because by then our gunners were shooting at anything that moved in the air without identifying it. Nobody knew how to identify airplanes, especially not people who just were bombed unexpectedly.

I think, you know it was strange, for a couple of days before Pearl Harbor we'd been getting submarine contacts out there when we were out there cruising around. Reported them, but nobody paid much attention. And one of the first things we did after, well, as I say we went back in after the attack was over on this ship, and when I was out there, why they transferred me to the *Blue*, and the *Blue* had been taken out by four ensigns. A guy out of '39 [Naval Academy class of 1939] was the senior ensign on board and they transferred me over and they'd been up all day and all night. So I brought the ship back in. I was the second senior guy on board then.