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## Dec. 7 ceremony honors USS Oklahoma heroes

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Pearl Harbor survivors and their families, military service members and civilians gathered at the USS Oklahoma Memorial on historic Ford Island on Dec. 7 to honor the 429 Sailors and Marines who lost their lives on the USS Oklahoma during the Pearl Harbor attack.

During the ceremony, the National Park Service Ceremonial Honor Guard presented the colors. Eileen Martinez, chief of interpretation for the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument, conducted a reading of the USS Oklahoma casualty list.

Members of the National Park Service presented a wreath for the sons and daughters of Pearl Harbor survivors.

Edward E. Vezey Jr., an Oklahoma survivor, attended the ceremony and offered remarks. He has been a frequent visitor to Dec. 7 remembrance events at Pearl Harbor.

"I went to battle with pajama pants, a cap, my boxers and a .45," Vezey said in an interview, recalling where he was during the Dec. 7, 1941 attack. He also talked about what his former ship meant to him. "It's your mother, your home, and if you spent a lot of time at sea as we did, it's the fundamental island of security," he said.

The number of those who died on Oklahoma was second only to the 1,177 men who perished on the USS Arizona. 'The Okie' was struck by multiple torpedoes and capsized within 12 minutes, trapping hundreds of men below the decks. Thirty-two crew members were saved two days later when fellow Sailors cut the hull open. Almost 400 of her crew members, most unidentified, are entombed at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (Punchbowl).

The USS Oklahoma was raised in 1943, made sea-worthy and sold for scrap. In May, 1947, she sank in a storm, about 540 miles out of Hawaii while being towed to San Francisco. She rests there now. The USS Oklahoma Memorial was formally dedicated on Dec. 7, 2007 at a joint ceremony hosted by the USS Oklahoma Memorial Committee and the National Park Service. The memorial is constructed of 429 pieces of three dimensional white marble columns, engraved with the names of each crew member who perished during the attack. The white marble columns are arranged in a "V" shape, designed to resemble Sailors manning the rails. Surrounding the columns are black marble slabs etched with notable quotes from Oklahoma survivors. U.S. Navy photo by David D. Underwood, Jr.