

Allentown man tells firsthand of Pearl Harbor attack

An interview by David Venditta, THE MORNING CALL, December 7, 2009

Alfred R. Taglang, 92, remembers the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, which brought the United States into World War II: 'The Japanese bombed Battleship Row with all the ships lined up nice. It was horrible what happened to those ships when the bombs and torpedoes hit.' (Harry Fisher/The Morning Call / November 5, 2009)



Alfred R. Taglang graduated from Liberty High School in 1937 and worked at his parents' grocery store in Bethlehem until the Army drafted him four years later.

In the summer of 1941 he arrived in Hawaii and became a supply sergeant with an anti-aircraft gun battery stationed near Pearl Harbor.

Taglang is 92 and lives in east Allentown. Today he remembers what happened the morning of Dec. 7, 1941, two days after he turned 24.

Sunday, Dec. 7, I got up about 6 o'clock for a shower and breakfast. A friend and I shot a basketball a little bit, then it was time for 8 o'clock Mass.

The church was on our base, Fort Kam. It was a beautiful fort on the coast, near Hickam Field and Pearl Harbor.

My friend and I got about five steps from the church and BANG!

He said, "Don't worry, that's the Navy having maneuvers."

We walked a little farther. BANG!

When we stepped inside, the priest said, "This is an

attack! Everybody get to your quarters as quick as possible!"

I was scared.

As soon as we left the church, we saw the red circles on the wings, so we knew they were Japanese planes. They were shooting at us as we ran. They could come as low as they wanted to. Nobody was firing at them. We had no ammunition.

I looked over at the harbor and saw the ships going down.

Somebody said, "Get out of here before you get hit!" I saw dirt flying up from the bullets hitting the ground maybe 10 yards away.

We snuck under the palm trees until the planes passed. I heard rumors later that a couple guys got hit.

My buddy and I kept going until we got to our barracks. We got there pretty fast. The colonel told us all to put a different shirt and pants on so everybody would have the same uniform -- if the Japanese invade, we'd know who was coming.

We were the 876th Antiaircraft Gun Battery. We were told to go where our guns were, the 90 millimeters, and wait there for further orders. Battery C had a four-man crew. My job was handing shells to the guy who loaded them into the gun.

There were four other guns with four-man crews on the gun point. We waited for our ammunition to come so we could join in the fight.

Waited and waited and waited.

Here, we had the ammunition up until Dec. 5, when they took it all back to storage. Everything was locked up. The Japanese envoys had gone to Washington to settle this thing with Roosevelt, and so we didn't have to worry about anything.

Now we stood and watched the Japanese planes come down, up and around and down again. We saw the harbor. The Japanese had it figured out so well that they came in and bombed Battleship Row with all the ships lined up nice. It was horrible, what happened to those ships when the bombs and torpedoes hit.

Terrible noise.

The Japanese came around and took care of our planes at Hickam Field. Then they came back to Pearl Harbor and dropped another load.

Our boys knocked down one plane near us, and they took the pilot out. He was half dead. He had a University of Hawaii ring on him -- he knew pretty well what he was doing.

Up on the gun point, our shells never arrived. We were supposed to protect Hickam Field and Pearl Harbor, but we never got a chance.

About 11 o'clock the Japanese were all gone, and it was over. We were sent back to our barracks to wait for further orders. But we had no more part in it.

I caught the first guard duty on the beach that night, from 7 to 9. I tell you, I was scared to death.

The first sergeant told me when I went out there: "Anything moves, shoot. Don't ask questions."

I wouldn't say I would've hated to kill a Japanese, but the idea of killing somebody goes through you, and it didn't sit well with me.

I was lucky. Nothing happened.

Epilogue

Five soldiers at Fort Kam, short for Kamehameha, were killed in the Japanese attack.

Staff Sgt. Taglang remained at Fort Kam for the rest of the war. He came home to south Bethlehem and his family's grocery business in the 700 block of Wyandotte Street, and married a girl he'd known since grade school, Hilda Tunner. They had two sons, Paul and Al Jr. Hilda died in 1996.

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