
LETTERS FROM PEARL HARBOR

In a few days we will remember an event that changed the world. President Franklin D. Roosevelt called it “a day which will live in infamy”. This event was the surprise attack by the Japanese on our naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941.

This event resulted in the deaths of 2,402 Americans and over 1,200 wounded. It brought about a declaration of war by the United States against the empire of Japan and brought us into World War II. The war was to last four long years with fighting in both the Pacific and in Europe. The nation was just beginning to recover from the Great Depression and now was faced with a world war with fighting on two fronts. The war effort was supported on the home front as people planted victory gardens, endured wartime rationing, had scrap metal drives, and did all they could to support those in the military.

The Pearl Harbor attack hit close to home for one family in Nevada County. S1c Harl Coplin Nelson had enlisted in the U. S. Navy in 1940 and happened to be on the *USS Arizona* when it was hit. He was one of 23 men from Arkansas on the *USS Arizona* who did not survive the attack and the only one from Nevada County to be killed at Pearl Harbor. The *USS Arizona* and other ships had been stationed at Pearl Harbor since April, 1940 as a deterrent to Japanese imperialism. The attack lasted about two hours with hundreds of airplanes being damaged or destroyed. All eight of the battleships in the Pacific fleet were damaged with four of them being sunk including the *USS Arizona*. A total of 1,177 Americans lost their lives when that ship was hit and 1,102 are entombed inside the ship.



Harl Nelson was the son of Frank and Verna Nelson who lived in the Goose Ankle community a few miles west of Bluff City. He had four brothers and five sisters. This was a close-knit farming community. Most of the young people had never ventured far from home. I can only imagine what Harl might have thought as he enlisted in the U. S. Navy at age 23 and traveled to San Diego, California for training before being sent to Hawaii. This was so far removed from the life he had known growing up in a rural area of Nevada County.

A few days ago, I received a telephone call from Mrs. Zettie Griffith Link who told me she and Harl exchanged letters while he was in service and that she still had those letters. Anyone far away from home in military service is glad to get letters from friends and family back home. Mrs. Link offered to share these letters with me and I have included excerpts from them in this article. I know Harl Nelson's relatives, some of whom still live around Bluff City, will be interested in these letters.

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I corrected some of the spelling in Harl's letters. The words in parentheses are mine.

*San Diego, CA (postcard sent during training at San Diego)
November 25, 1940*

I guess everyone are having a big time in school. This place is just like school. My school days are back again. I sure are having a grand time.

Tell everyone around there hello for me. This sure is a beautiful place around here. It is town as far as you can see around this station.

*Honolulu, Hawaii
Feb. 22, 1941*

....Well, the news from Hawaii. It isn't much but I tell you what I know. It is a lock (lot) of purty (pretty) scenery out here. I haven't been to town but twice since we come over. We went out on sea and stay about a week. We had a lock (lot) of drilling while we were out. My battle(?) is traner (trainer) on number 2 anti-aircraft gun. I till (tell) you I don't like my job any to well.

We have a lock (lot) of fun when we are in port. They have all kinds of sports on the ship. We have ball games, boat rases (races) and other sports I am in the boat rases (races) team. We went over to the Island the other day and taken a ture (tour) over it. The one that is in the boat team half (have) to run 2 miles every day. We go over and run our 2 miles and look the country over coming back.

I hardly ever go to town, for I don't think much of that place. Everyone enjoy it the first time or two they go over. Then they don't thank (think) much of it. Everyone can't have as good time over here as they can in the States, or I can't. I don't know when we will go back to the States. We may go back in a week or two. Then it may be 2 or 3 months before we leave here. I have got where it make no difference with me. Just so I stay on top (ha).

I guess every thang (thing) around Bluff City is just like it was before I left. Is everyone getting along all right around there? I guess everyone is happy and having a big time. I hope so.

*Honolulu, Hawaii
April 20, 1941*

Sure was prow (proud) to get your letter. It seam (seem) to chear (cheer) me up. I injoy (enjoy) reading a letter from a good friend. If it wasn't for the letters I get from back there I could hardy (hardly) stay here....

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..... I guess you enjoy working in Prescott. I wouldn't mind being in Prescott for a while (ha). Going to Honolulu isn't like going to Prescott. It is a lock (lot) purty (prettier) town than Prescott, but I don't like it as well.

We are at sea now. We are going around and around a little island that sure is purty (pretty). I sure would like to take a look over the island that we are going around....

USS Arizona
May 24, 1941

....I am hoping I can get a 30 days leave and come back between now and the first of the year. It don't look like we are ever going back to the States. I am about to get enough of this place. (ha).

Well, how is every thang (thing) around there? Lively, I guess. It is about time for the all-day singings to start up. I would like to make that one at Bluff City. I bet it will be good. You said they was playing ball at Bluff City. I sure would like to play ball this summer. It has been summer with me every since last summer....

You sure ought to see this place and the people over here. Anyone will see a lock (lot) of things here that they won't see back in the States. After you stay here awhile, you will get tired of it.....



Harl sent this picture of the Army and Navy YMCA in Honolulu. He said they called it the Navy boy's home when at shore.

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U. S. Navy
June 27, 1941

I have been in Long Beach (CA) for two weeks. Don't know how long I will be here. I went to Chandler, Arizona on a 7 day leave....

I guess every thang (thing) is lively around there? Do they ever have any parties? I haven't been to a party since Xmas. I would like to go to one...

....I sure did have a good time in Arizona. I met several nice looking girls in Chandler. It was one of my ship mates went with me... I think most of the boys in Chandler was mad at us. They were proud (proud) when we left. I don't guess there is many boys left there is it? I guess the boys that is left sure is having a good time....

I would like to get a leave in December so I could be there during Xmas. That is the liveliest time during the year....



Well, Harl's wish to get a leave in December so he could be home for Christmas was not to be. I can only imagine the anxiety of Harl's parents back in Arkansas when they heard the first news reports about the surprise attack at Pearl Harbor knowing their son was assigned to that ship.

About half of the casualties of the attack at Pearl Harbor occurred on the *USS Arizona*. The *USS Arizona* Memorial is one of the most visited memorials. The memorial straddles the sunken ship which is the resting place of 1,102 sailors and Marines who died on the ship during the attack. Even some of those who survived the attack have requested that their ashes be placed inside the ship after their death so they can be with their shipmates who died on that ship. I saw a TV show not long ago in which they showed how this is done. There have been at least 36 such interments and they say only about twelve more *USS Arizona* survivors are still living.

Thanks again to Mrs. Link for sharing these letters. I never thought that someday I would be sitting at my computer reading letters written by someone serving on the *USS Arizona*. These letters give us a greater understanding of what went through the mind of a young man from Arkansas who was stationed so far from home and his family.

Harl Nelson has one surviving brother, James Claudis Nelson, who is also a veteran of World War II. He is currently residing in a Prescott nursing home.

Harl Nelson was not the only man from Nevada County to lose his life in World War II. Sixty-one other men from the county died while in service during that war. Some were

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brought back home for burial, but several have markers in far-off places like Manila, Okinawa, Leyte, Luxembourg, France, Belgium, and Italy.

A nice war memorial is located on the grounds of the Nevada County courthouse with the names of all those from Nevada County who died while in the service during World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. More names were added for the more recent wars. One man from Nevada County died just a few weeks ago in Afghanistan. All of them gave the ultimate sacrifice and we must never forget to honor them for their service.

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE *USS ARIZONA*

1. 23 sets of brothers were serving on *USS Arizona* and died during the attack.
2. All 22 members of the ship's band died during the attack. They were on deck preparing to play for the daily flag raising ceremony. This is the only time an entire band was lost in military action.
3. Fuel continues to leak from the *USS Arizona*. The ship had just been refueled the day before with 1.5 million gallons of fuel. About 9 quarts leak into the harbor each day and is sometimes referred to as "black tears".
4. Over ten percent of the cost of the *USS Arizona* memorial was raised in a benefit concert in Hawaii by Elvis Presley in March, 1961.



The *USS Arizona* Memorial

The memorial was dedicated May 30, 1962. Over one million people visit the memorial each year. It is only accessible by boat. No part of the memorial touches the ship.

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The War Memorial at the Nevada County Courthouse

LEST WE FORGET

Into Thy loving care, O God, we commit our beloved dead, whose noble deeds of supreme sacrifice we wish to enshrine in the hearts of this and future generations that they may labor for peace.



Several readers tried to identify this object pictured in the last issue. Several thought it was some type of muffler. Some said some sort of filter or vent and one thought it was used in brewing tea.

Actually it is an irrigator. The patent number and the name Turfgrass Co., Tucson, AZ are printed on the object. A patent number search reveals that it was invented by William Landreth of Tucson in 1945. The purpose was to reduce the amount of soil erosion during irrigation. I'm not sure exactly how it was used.

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The 27th annual Christmas and Candlelight at Old Washington State Park will be held on December 7th and December 14th at the park. Daylight tours of the historic village will be from 1:00 p.m. to 5 p.m. After dark, the park can be seen with natural 19th century decorations and thousands of lights. Luminaries will light the way for you to stroll the streets and see historic buildings and musicians caroling throughout the town.

Surry rides will be available and William's Tavern will have a Christmas buffet supper beginning at 4 p.m.

Advance tickets are available for \$9.00 for adults and \$4.00 for children 7-12 years of age (children under six are free). Prices are good until the day of the event when they will increase to \$10.00 and \$5.00. To purchase advance tickets, contact Southwest Arkansas Regional Archives at 870-983-2633.

The event is presented by the Southwest Arkansas Regional Archives Foundation, Pioneer Washington Restoration Foundation, the city of Washington, and Historic Washington State Park.

My dad taught me this little nonsense poem when I was a little kid. I was just wondering if any of you remember this poem. Write and let me know if you remember it.

TWO DEAD BOYS

One bright day in the middle of the night,
Two dead boys got up to fight.

Back to back they faced each other,
Drew their swords and shot each other.

The deaf policeman heard the noise,
Came and shot the two dead boys.

If you don't believe this lie is true,
Ask the blind man, he saw it too.

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NEWS ITEMS FROM PRESCOTT (from *The Nevada News*)

December, 1954—

The Nevada Theater installs a wide screen and cinemascope. George Wylie is the manager.

February, 1955—

The Harlem Globetrotters appeared in Prescott.

Prescott Implement Co. advertised a Willys Bermuda sedan for \$1795.

Frank Cottingham Grocery advertised 8 pound of pure hog lard for \$1.55.

March, 1955—

Zack Finn is the new manager of the Nevada and Gem theaters.

There was a city-wide revival on the court house lawn. Services were held twice daily in Prescott churches for one week.

April, 1955---

The Salk polio vaccine was licensed for public use and shots were started in Nevada County.

Prescott Motor Co. opens on Hwy. 67. Bob Yarbrough is general manager.

Rita's Beauty Salon opens on West Elm St. in the Cox building.

May, 1955---

The second polio shots are given in Nevada County.

Langston Motor and Equipment Co. advertised the 1955 Plymouth which was chosen by artists as the most beautiful car in America.



I checked two persimmon seeds and found a spoon in both of them. According to the old Farmer's Almanac, that means a lot of heavy, wet snow this winter.

If you find a fork, it means light, dusty snows or a mild winter. A knife means icy, cold winds.

Rainfall record for October—7.5 inches. That's the wettest month so far this year.