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AFTAC honors Pearl Harbor survivors, Pacific vets

By Susan A. Romano, AFTAC Public Affairs

PATRICK AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – Despite 74 years having passed, their memories are vivid and their emotions deep.

Two Pearl Harbor survivors were the distinguished guests of honor at the 20th Annual Pearl Harbor and Pacific Theater Veterans Ceremony Dec. 7, hosted by the Air Force Technical Applications Center here. In addition to the survivors, nearly 100 other Pacific Theater veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam were in attendance to be recognized for their crucial role during those conflicts.



George Herold, 91, and Clarence “Bud” Lane, 90, were both seamen 1st class when the Japanese bombed the Hawaiian island seven decades ago. Lane was stationed at Pearl Harbor as a member of a PBY (patrol boat) beaching crew. He was scheduled to muster at 8 a.m. that fateful Sunday morning, but he never made it there. The hangar where muster was to take place had been obliterated by Japanese kamikaze pilots.

“It was gut-wrenching to see,” said Lane. “I had just come off liberty that weekend and was ready to report to duty when the attacks happened. Everywhere you looked was chaos.” Through tears, he continued, “This day – this ceremony – is not about me. It’s about those who laid down their lives in 1941. My mates on the Arizona, on the Utah, and those just sleeping in the barracks – they’re the ones this day is all about. They’re the ones who paid the ultimate price. We can never forget them.”

Herold, an Art Carney doppelgänger with an accompanying New York accent, was not permanently stationed in Hawaii at the time of the assault. “I went through boot camp in the summer of 1941 and went to submarine school in San Diego right after that,” he recalled. “The Navy sent me to Pearl Harbor for more schooling in October of ’41. I was at the sub base, not far from the harbor, when the Japs flew over us. They weren’t interested in the subs at the time – they had their eyes on those big battleships.”

He continued, “It doesn’t feel like it happened yesterday, and I don’t remember all their names, but I definitely remember all their faces – all the faces of the fellas I was there with, seeing our beautiful ships being destroyed from above. Broke my heart.”

Crackling over outdoor speakers, audience members listened to the words of President Franklin D. Roosevelt as he delivered his historic address to Congress, calling Dec. 7th, “...a date which will live in infamy.” Immediately following Roosevelt’s speech were recordings of President Harry S. Truman discussing the U.S.’s entry in the Korean War, and President Lyndon B. Johnson’s remarks about Vietnam.

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The morning event drew AFTAC's largest crowd to date – nearly 400 people in attendance – and boasted the largest number of veteran-honorees, all of whom were bestowed certificates of appreciation for their service.

U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Vincent Stewart, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, was the event's keynote speaker.

"These survivors among us, and all those who served during World War II, they truly are the greatest generation," the general said. "We are here on this day to honor the legacy of them and all our Pacific Theater vets who served to protect our way of life. Today's combat veterans can relate to what the Pearl Harbor veterans went through that morning, for it is their blood, sweat and tears that have brought us our freedom. I thank you for your service, your sacrifice and your commitment."



After the keynote, 45th Space Wing Chaplain, Capt. Barry Kemp, delivered the benediction.

"We offer a prayer of remembrance as we see these incredible faces with their incredible stories and their magnitude of sacrifice," said Kemp. "We thank them for blessing our great nation, for they are truly the answer to our prayers."

Prior to the conclusion of formal portion of the ceremony, members of the Naval Ordnance Test Unit fired off 40mm cannons in a 21-gun salute, and AFTAC's own Senior Airman Robert Scott played Taps on the bugle.

"The ceremony's purpose was to pay tribute to those who served at such an important time in our military history," said Col. Jennifer P. Sovada, AFTAC commander. "They are a vital part of our military heritage, and we pledge to continue this tradition that began 20 years ago."