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## **John A. Scocos Column: Wisconsin Remembers Pearl Harbor**

It is truly a day that has lived in infamy.

December 7th, marks one of the most significant dates in American history. The Japanese attack on U.S. forces at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii launched our nation's involvement in World War II. More than 332,000 men and women from Wisconsin served in World War II and nearly 4,000 died in the war. Of the nearly 30,000 veterans of WWII still living in Wisconsin, a remaining few Pearl Harbor survivors are still with us and today is a very special day for them and us.

On December 7, 1941, at 7:55 a.m. Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japanese torpedo and bomber planes. The attack ended just before 10:00 a.m. In less than two hours, the American forces at Pearl Harbor were devastated. Twenty-one ships of the U.S. Pacific Fleet were sunk or damaged. More than 2,400 Americans died and another 1,100 were wounded. All eight battleships moored on Battleship Row – the Arizona, California, Maryland, Nevada, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and West Virginia – were sunk or damaged during the Japanese assault.

Wisconsinite Clyde Stephenson was there that day. Training at a rifle range when the attack began, he saw Japanese torpedo bombers flying in around 500 feet in the air. He and his fellow Marines grabbed their rifles and started shooting at the planes. While seemingly not the best match against planes, Stephenson and the others were credited with shooting down four Japanese planes with their rifles. Pearl Harbor was only the beginning though – Stephenson went on to fight in the South Pacific to retake islands from the Japanese.

Other Wisconsinites were also there. Dorwin Lamkin of Hudson was a Navy medical corpsman assigned to the USS Nevada who was treating the injured in the sick bay when the Nevada was hit. Mel Stapleton of North Lake was stationed at Hickam Field near Pearl Harbor used a machine gun to fight against the Japanese planes. Rhoda Ziesler, an Army nurse from Manitowoc who triaged patients at the 215th General Hospital on the morning of the attack, and whose artifacts now reside at our Wisconsin Veterans Museum. And there were many others with equally as compelling experiences.

Many thousands of Wisconsinites served in World War II and days like today are cause for remembrance, reflection, and celebration. We are given the opportunity to reflect on the service and sacrifice our World War II generation and how they shaped our world.

Even the passage of seven decades cannot diminish the magnitude of the attack or the extreme sacrifice of the thousands of brave Americans who lost their lives. It is important for all of us to remember their legacy, some of whom were our friends and neighbors here in Wisconsin.

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*(John A. Scocos is Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. He is an Iraq War veteran.)*