

THE FREEDOM COMMITTEE OF ORANGE COUNTY
(A 401-C-3 Nonprofit Community Service Organization)

*Neighborhood Community Center
1845 Park Ave., Costa Mesa, CA. 92627*

Minutes of the Meeting of December 14, 2011

Pledge of Allegiance: Dr. Norman Loats

Invocation: Pastor Frank Orzio, Wounded Warriors Ministry

Binnacle List: Harry Selling

Guests Present: (26) Jeff Aocen, Robert Anuba, Nancy Bolinger, Valerie Boston, Chasten Bowin, David Brooks, Gary Crest, Steve Clifford, Wendy D’Amore, Tom Gorla, Dwight Hanson, Geri Hanson, Brian Helve, Louis Kreidelbaugh, Charles Larue, Brandon Lewis, Ken Pruitt, Mr. & Mrs. Redmond, Kathy Roberts, Sean Rowe, Jeannie Thurn, Bobbie Tickle, Marv Tickle, David Weiland and Clarence Wolfe.

Members Present: (48) Kelly Alcala, Jim Baker, Bob Bankston, Rally Bates, Howard Beach, Jesse Bequette, Jack Cole, Jeff Davis, Tom Egan, Eddie Felix, Archie Gregory, Raymond Grissom, Sid Hallburn, Jack Hammett, Arnold Hanson, Dick Higgins, William Holiday, John Hughes, Michael Knybel, Tom Knybel, David Lester, Norm Loats, Bill Mall, Ted Marinos, Vern Martin, Robert Meyer, Edison Miller, Dick O’Brien, Don Oldis, Frank Orzio, Frank Pelicciotti, Bob Perry, Lou Passemato, Jim Powers, Frank Ramirez, Tim Richards, John Skara, Bob Sternfels, Bob Stoddard, Ted Tanner, Bob Thomas, Jim Thurn, Mike Trerotola, Eugene Verge, Phillip Vinci, Gene Wallace, Paul Wilder, Scott Williams and Sid Yahn.

Associate Members Present: (13) Bette Bell, Robby Conn, Eliza Delpizzo, Kay Felix, David Ferguson, Ramona Hill, Carmen Holiday, Pat O’Brien, Jeff Sebek, Linda Wallace, Denise Weiland, Rob Wood and Elizabeth Yee.

Special Presentation

“Pearl Harbor Revisited (70 Years Later)”

By the Survivors



Just about everyone has seen the photos of Navy ships exploding in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941. Many know that it was the start of WWII for America. How many have heard the tragic story **Thomas** “first-hand” from a Survivor of the Pearl Harbor Attack? The Freedom Committee of Orange County heard their personal story from **8 survivors**; “men (who) knew what really happened that day!” *Remember Pearl Harbor!*

Higgins... Bankston...Gregory... Hammett... Hughes
Thomas... Wolfe..... Verge

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O.W. (Bob) Bankston was aboard the battleship *BB 44, USS California*, flagship of the Pacific Fleet, that morning serving as an electrician in the engine room. He heard/felt the first torpedo hit. And then a second torpedo struck. As the engine room crew scrambled topside; a



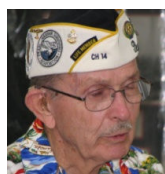
bomb struck killing 53 sailors. Hurling through the air, Bob landed trapped under some wreckage. His crew was able to pull him free but he was badly burned. As he reached the safety of the dock, someone asked what they could do for his burns. "Give me something cold, anything". They quickly poured *cold* tomato juice all over him and he felt relief immediately. Bob also remembers many false alarms air attacks that night. Note: The *USS California* was later raised, modernized and rejoined the fleet in May 1944. Two *USS California* men were awarded the Medal of Honor for their action on December 1941.

Archie Gregory, now 96 years, was a Boatswain Mate 2nd Class, was assigned to the *Repair Ship AV-4, the USS Vestal*. Moored alongside the *BB-39, USS Arizona*, Archie



was walking up the gangplank when he felt the ship shake as two Jap torpedoes struck. Two minutes later he was blown into the oily, burning water as the forward magazine exploded. He climbed onto a captain's gig, and with other sailors, began rescuing men from the flaming water. "Then, the attacking planes came back and machine gunned the guys" Gregory said. The first batch of about 30 rescued sailors were hit with machine gun fire just after he'd let them off on the dock. The next group of rescued sailors were taken across the harbor for safety.

Dick Higgins was assigned to a PBY Squadron (*VP-22*) with hangers on Ford Island. He was

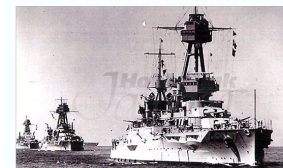


in his bunk in the barracks when the first wave of planes attacked. He saw the "meat balls" (red circle insignia on the wings confirming they were Japanese). At first no one was allowed out of the barracks because the planes were strafing (machine gunning). When the bombs started falling, the barracks were probably targets so they ran to the hangers and started pushing the float planes into the water. Gasoline from the PBYs that had been hit soon engulfed the rest of the planes. All the planes were destroyed or damaged. Later *VP-22* was issued all new PBYs and Dick served in naval aviation for the duration of the war and retired as Chief Aviation Mate. He is presently President of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association.

John Hughes was an enlisted marine stationed on Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) *Ewa*. The Air Station and its supporting equipment sustained a great deal of damage. Japanese aircraft tore into the base 2 minutes *before* the attack on Pearl Harbor. Initially Zero fighters strafed the aircraft, men, and equipment of the base and then Vals strafed as they returned from their bombing runs at Pearl Harbor. Of the 49 aircraft based at the field that morning 33, were destroyed and 16 seriously damaged. John only had a rifle but he started shooting at the Jap planes. He survived WWII and continued to serve in the Marines as a naval aviator for 27 years, retiring with the rank of Major.



Robert (Bob) Thomas, a graduate of the Naval Academy in February 1941, was an



Ensign serving aboard the battleship *BB 36, USS Nevada* as an anti-aircraft battery officer. He awoke from his bunk on December 7th with "This is no drill; we are being bombed". He ran topside and began working with the crew firing at the Japanese bombers. When the nearby *USS Arizona* exploded, the shock wave knocked him off his feet. The first torpedo struck but the *USS Nevada* was able to get underway. As the battleship steamed through the harbor, she was hit by six armor

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piercing bombs that hit the deck of the USS Nevada, penetrating several levels into the ship and exploding. Bob remembers looking up and seeing three Jap planes drop their bombs. The first two missed but the third bomb hit 15 feet from Bob. As the smoke cleared, he realized he was severely injured in both his right wrist and right leg. He climbed/fell down 2 ladders and was rescued. As he lay in the hospital, he thought “the Japs tried to kill me but couldn’t”. He had a feeling that “the greatest power comes from above”. It would take Bob a year in the hospital to recover and he continued serving in the Navy until 1964 retiring with the rank of Captain. The USS Nevada was beached before it could sink in the harbor blocking passage for other ships. It would be refloated in February 1942, repaired and fighting by May 1943.



Eugene Verge was an Ensign aboard the Seaplane Tender *USS Curtis*, AV-4. On December 7,



1941, only one third of the 1,124 man crew was on board; the rest ashore. *Curtis* was tied up to mooring buoys at the mouth of Pearl Harbor's Middle Loch, across the channel from Ford Island. Gene “had the bridge” command until 8 am. As he went below, he heard three explosions from Ford Island. Two hangers were on fire. Five planes swooped by and as the planes banked sharply, he saw orange circles on each wing: the Japanese were attacking Pearl Harbor. Being the only officer on the Bridge, he ordered “General Quarters”. He ordered the 5 inch and 50 caliber guns to “Commence Firing”. And “Underway Emergency” to start the ship moving. Then a bomb hit the boat deck and penetrated three decks and exploded. A Jap submarine periscope appeared followed by the conning tower and a torpedo. Maneuvering the *USS Curtis* to miss the torpedo and returning fire, the sub was sunk in a mass of air bubbles. The anti-aircraft guns scored a hit on a dive bomber but the flaming plane crashed into the starboard side. A bomb hit the starboard side, killing 20 men. Three more planes shot down. And the attack faded away.

Clarence Wolfe was aboard the *USS Nevada* with Bob Thomas. He was impressed by the number of medals that were awarded. 15 Medals of Honor were awarded to the heroic men that ranked from Machinist Mate 3rd Class to Rear Admiral. Only five were alive to receive the award.

Jack Hammett was a Navy Corpsman at the Naval Hospital that Sunday, living off-base with his wife.



His landlord collected the rent and then said Pearl Harbor is being bombed. Racing to the hospital, his taxi was strafed but he arrived as the second wave of Japanese planes attacked. He screened the casualties as they arrived. Overwhelmed by numbers, he worked 72 hours doing triage and identifying the dead. Jack went on to serve 22 years in the Navy retiring as a Warrant Officer. An interesting note; the wives were left alone, they banded together, arming themselves with knives became the “Butcher Brigade” to stop the anticipated Jap invasion.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Bette Bell, FCOC presented the monthly report of deposits and expenses. Copies were available.

There are many books of interest on military subjects that can be checked out for *free*. Thanks to **Mona Hill**! She has a great library that she has developed for our members.

Denise Weiland is signing up veterans for the 2012 Corona del Mar High interviews. Students will prepare a report of the interview and present it to the Veteran in March 2012.

A special thanks to **Eliza Delpizzo who provide homemade cookies for the FCOC

(Minutes of the Meeting prepared by Tim Richard)s

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jack Hammett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jack Hammett
Chairman