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Capture Living History - Carl Sansevero survived Pearl Harbor

By Carl Kelly

The following story is the first in a series for the *Naples Sun Times*, reporting on the experiences of a few of our local World War II (WWII) veterans. The Collier County Communications and Customer Relations Department is conducting interviews with veterans to create and collect audio and video taped oral histories and associated transcriptions of American WWII veterans. The department has given *Naples Sun Times* access to the program called Capture Living History and these veterans during their interviews.

Carl Sansevero was a shot caseman aboard the *USS Bagley* when it docked in Pearl Harbor on Dec. 5, 1941. The ship took a starboard side berth and waited dry dock time for repair of a separated bilge keel. But, in the morning of Dec. 7, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. And Sansevero was given memories that sometimes keep him awake.

The *Bagley* was docked where the torpedo planes made their run toward the large ships at Ford Island. "I could almost touch the airplanes with my hand as they went by," Sansevero explained. "They were so close."

"There was a man on watch at the tail end of the ship," he recounted. "This is the thing that bothers me every night. He had a 30.06 rifle in his hand. Why didn't I take that rifle and start shooting at those planes? I could have thrown the rifle at them and hit them. Why didn't I take that rifle and start shooting at them as they passed?"

The machine gunners and gunners mates took their positions and began firing. The *Bagley* started her engines, cast off and went into battle. Every non-essential item was thrown overboard, including the Coke machines. She didn't get her dry dock time, didn't get her bilge keel repairs.

"It was a scary situation," Sansevero said. "At night when I go to bed it comes to me. At times when I get relaxed and I start thinking, 'Goodbye, Joe,' then I can't sleep." But, at the time it was different. "Being on a gun like this you have a job to do. This is what you're trained for and this is what you do. After Pearl Harbor we just went back to our usual routine. But, we were constantly aware that we were attacked and that it was going to happen again."

The USS Bagley participated in all the major battles of the Pacific over the next four years, Guadalcanal, the Solomons, New Britain, the Marianas, the Philippines, Okinawa, Luzon, and Petty Officer Sansevero did his job. "When the gun fired, I would have to get in there and get the hot shell out," he explained, "to remove any hot shells that might be laying around, and throw them over the side."

"The Japanese were damned good fighters," he noted. "They were no fools." He remembered an attack later in the war. "They caught us very early in the morning, drizzling rain, dark. You couldn't see a thing in front of your face. They sent their biplane up and they dropped a flare and lit up every one of our ships in the bay. Every one. Very sharp. Very smart. Then the torpedoes started coming and the shells started flying through our rigging."

Many of the memories, though, are painful. In one battle, "We went along side a ship that was on fire. The ammunition boxes were going off. We picked up 450 survivors, 150 of them were seriously wounded. It was so bad. I picked up one guy under the arms and his skin was falling off."

"Bodies were strewn all over the deck, especially in the back. I went over to this guy and he was sitting down against the bulkhead, and you could see a big hunk of crooked metal still stuck through his shoe and through his foot. I remember it to this day. I tried to console him, 'Can I get some coffee for you? What can I do?' He said, 'Nothing.' He was in agony. I couldn't do anything. I felt like crying for the guy."

Sansevero's memory of the end of the war is different, though. He related when he got orders shipping him back to the states, "Nobody ran to his locker as fast as I did."

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