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## Collier veteran recalls experiences at Pearl Harbor

By JOHN HENDERSON, [jfhenderson@naplesnews.com](mailto:jfhenderson@naplesnews.com)

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For Paul Smith, the memories of Pearl Harbor are vivid, and frequently play out in his dreams.

"It is something I'll never, ever forget," said Smith, a Naples resident who is among only a few Pearl Harbor veterans in Southwest Florida who are still alive to relay their stories.

This morning, on the 64th anniversary of the Japanese invasion that catapulted the United States into World War II, Smith will have coffee and reflect with buddies.

When the Japanese attack began, Smith was in the Marine barracks surrounding Pearl Harbor's parade grounds. He was finishing breakfast. Loud explosions rang out.

"We wondered, 'What is going on?' " he said.

"We went outside to see. As we ran out onto the parade grounds, we could see Japanese pilots dropping torpedoes in the harbor.

"It was nerve-racking. We didn't have anything to shoot with."

He is convinced the attack would have been thwarted if they had guns loaded and ready to fire.

Instead, they were forced to pluck bullets from machine-gun belts to load rifles.

"We were totally and completely taken by surprise," he said.

His stress continued into the evening hours as he guarded tanks containing hundreds of thousands of gallons of fuel for ships. He wondered if the Japanese would make a second run.

"I was some kind of a scared guy," he said.

Each year, as more veterans die, there are fewer and fewer people like Smith who can relay their World War II stories.

Collier County has embarked on a project to preserve their stories and legacy.

Staff has been interviewing veterans and creating a Web page with pictures and sound bites of their stories. It can be seen at [www.colliergov.net/communications](http://www.colliergov.net/communications).



Lexey Swall/Staff

Naples resident Paul Smith, 84, stands outside of his home, where he hangs a Pearl Harbor Survivor flag. Smith was a private in the 3rd Defense Battalion in the U.S. Marine Corps and was stationed in Pearl Harbor between 1940 and 1943.

In October 2005, the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress contacted county staff hoping to partner with the county's "World War II Capture Living History Project." The interviews are being sent up to Washington when completed.

About 80 are done.

"We recognize this needs to be done as soon as possible so that we can preserve these stories," said Sandra Arnold, a county public information coordinator who is overseeing the project.

Peter Kraley, director of Collier County's Veterans Services Department, said there are about 35,000 veterans of all wars in Collier County. He said the county doesn't have a figure breaking down the exact number of World War II vets or how many among them are Pearl Harbor veterans.

"We're losing guys at a pretty substantial rate," he said, noting that about 1,300 to 1,500 World War II veterans die each day nationwide.

Michael R. Trephan, who handles press relations for the Marine Corps League of Naples, has been trying to persuade the World War II veterans to share their stories for the county's project. He is hoping that several hundred respond.

He said persuading them to talk is not always easy.

"I lot of vets will say, 'You can't get these kids interested,' " he said.

Carl Sanservero is one who decided to talk, and his Pearl Harbor experience has been preserved by Collier County, even though he recently died. In his own words, Sanservero described the fateful day.

He was an 18-year-old in the Navy, on the USS Bagley DD 386.

Servicemen on the ship shot down six enemy aircraft that were attacking the fleet.

The attack took them by such surprise that they had to unwrap the plastic off the ship's guns before firing.

"I was scared. I guess I must have turned white as a sheet. ... I was shaking inside," he said.

Over the years, Sanservero had recurring dreams of his experience.

"I never go to sleep without thinking about them," he said.

He said it bothered him that he didn't grab a rifle from a shipmate guarding the tail end of the ship.

He was convinced he could have shot down at least one of the Japanese bombers.

"I could almost touch them (Japanese planes) with my hands, they were so close," he said.

As they ran out of ammunition and men ran get more, the Japanese planes continued to swoop down on the ship.

He crouched down into the base of a large gun.

"Bombs are falling all over the place," he said.

Asked by the interviewer whether he prayed, he replied:

"I didn't even have time to say anything," he said.

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