

Veteran Francis Emond

At Pearl Harbor, Navy Musician Hung his Horn for a Stretcher

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL STONE

In recognition of December's 75th anniversary of Pearl Harbor, Senior Times has been devoting its World War II veteran tributes to survivors of the attack living in Florida. Featured here to conclude the Pearl Harbor series is Chief Warrant Officer Francis Emond of Pensacola.

Music floats through the air of the Bloch Center arena near the docks of Pearl Harbor on this Dec. 6 night.

There, the bands from the battleships Pennsylvania and Tennessee and the old transport and support ship Argonne are playing in the latest round of the months-long competition Battle of Music.

The bands are basically big bands — complete with woodwinds, brass and drums — and they have to perform a number each from four different styles: swing, ballad, specialty and jitterbug.

Watching in the audience are members of the battleship Arizona's band — which, along with the Marine Corps Barracks band, have already advanced to the final round scheduled for Dec. 20.

The competition climbs late into the night, ending about midnight with the Pennsylvania and the Tennessee chosen to advance to the finals.

French horn player Francis Emond — who at 23 is the oldest of the Pennsylvania's 24 band members — returns to the ship at maybe 12:30 a.m. or so and settles in.

The Pawtucket, Rhode Island, native and musician first

class has been in the Navy since 1938, joining after three years of post-high school work in a wire mill making 25 cents an hour.

Emond was thankful to have a job during the Great Depression. But he found a better calling — one that allowed him to march and play at the 1939-40 New York World's Fair — after hearing a Navy broadcast asking for musicians. "So I applied, and I was very lucky to be accepted."

In the morning after the competition at Bloch Center, the Pennsylvania's musicians and the other ships' bands arise to play "The Star-Spangled Banner" topside on their ships for the morning flag-raising.

On the Pennsylvania, the band members line up 15 minutes prior to the scheduled time of 8 a.m., and at 7:55, the bugle player sounds off to signal that the daily ceremony is about to commence.

"We knew that we were going to have a war over there, but we were like taking a club against a group that had machine guns."

But then, a disturbance in the distance catches the musicians' attention.

"I looked up in the sky and heard some noise and saw a line of planes coming in, small planes," 98-year-old Emond, the only band member from the Pennsylvania living today and one of 2,300 or fewer remaining Pearl Harbor survivors, recalls



Pearl Harbor survivor Francis Emond, who was preparing to play "The Star-Spangled Banner" topside on the battleship Pennsylvania when the attack began, stands outside his Pensacola home.



All ships' band members have battle stations, including the 21 players on the battleship Arizona... all are killed when the ship explodes about 8:10 a.m.



from the living room of his Pensacola home.

“The first one peeled off and dropped something — or I thought the plane was coming apart. And I watched [the piece] come all the way down to the ground. It hit on Ford Island in a hangar, exploded in smoke and flames, made a loud noise.

“Looked back up [at] the airplanes, we could see the big red spots [of machine-gun fire] on the fuselage. So we realized instantly that we were under attack.”

And so begins the tragedy of Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, a few minutes after the 183 Japanese fighters, bombers and torpedo planes of the first wave struck the airfields elsewhere on the island to ensure their air superiority.

Unharmful by the first strafing run, Emond remains topside long enough to catch the initial events. His view at the Pennsylvania's stern is perhaps more encompassing than most be-

cause the ship is sitting at a distance from the attackers' main target: battleship row.

For propeller maintenance, the Pennsylvania is in dry dock at 10-10 Pier south of Ford Island, where the other six battleships present for the attack float just offshore.

The sky “was getting full of airplanes,” Emond remembers, and he sees one of them drop a torpedo and the wooden fins attached to it break off upon impact with the water.

(Because of their heavy plunge, torpedoes typically could be used only at deeper depths, but in preparation for the attack on the shallow harbor, the Japanese had attached the fins to stabilize in-air travel before detaching upon impact with the water.)

That first torpedo travels under the minelayer Oglala and hits the neighboring light cruiser Helena, causing significant damage to the latter while eventually sinking the former.

Left: The USS Arizona (BB-39) burning after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Below: View of the capsized U.S. Navy battleship USS Oklahoma (BB-37) at Pearl Harbor.



Emond sees the ships bounce up and down from the explosion.

While several of the harbor's ships are beginning to take a beating from the torpedoes because of vulnerable positioning — perhaps the easiest battleship target is the Oklahoma, which will take nine torpedoes by the time it's over — the dry dock around the Pennsylvania guards her.

Emond doesn't get to watch these events for long, though.

The battleship's command quickly orders the men to their battle stations, so Emond reports below deck to his: serving as a stretcher-bearer for the dead and wounded.

All ships' band members have battle stations, including the 21 players on the battleship Arizona. Theirs is handling ammunition below one of the large turrets at the front half of the ship, but all are killed when the ship explodes about 8:10 a.m. from a bomb hitting its forward magazine.

(These are men Emond considered friends, and they'll be posthumously crowned winners of the Battle of Music.)

Because of the Pennsylvania's protected position, Emond waits below in relative peace with another band member turned stretcher-bearer for what seems like a long while.

From where they are, the explosions outside can only be felt, not heard.

"You didn't know what was going on," he says. "No one knew exactly what was going on outside. You were down inside the ship."

But at 9:06, one explosion shakes the Pennsylvania far more violently than the others, and Emond instantly recognizes what has happened.

A direct bomb hit.

Emond and his bandmate spring into action and head



Emond remained a Navy musician for another 23 years after World War II, serving around the country as a band leader and teacher. This included returning to Pearl Harbor for a year.

toward the dark, oily, watery hole the bomb created. There, dead men are scattered about in the weekend day's uniform of white shorts and undershirts.

The stretcher-bearers quickly discover the difficulty of their task.

"The people close to the explosion, all their flesh was burned off, so it was hard to pick them up 'cause you couldn't grab them by the legs or arms or anything because their flesh was all loose," Emond says, stuttering, something he does when talking about the attack. "So we got to pickin' people up by the shoes and around the neck and the hair in order to get them in the stretcher."

Making matters worse are the ladders up which the two must carry the deceased, none of whom they knew personally.

"It was pretty rough there for a while," Emond recalls. "But what I remember to this day is the smell of the flesh, the burnt flesh. It's like when I have a cancer, a skin cancer, and they cauterize the area: You can smell the smell of the flesh being burned.

"And I can still smell that today."

As the two move about, they're unsure if more bombs will come, but thankfully for them and the others aboard, the *Pennsylvania* doesn't take another. But the ship does receive fire damage to her bow from the *Cassin* and the *Downes*, destroyers docked immediately in front of her that burst into flames after a bomb hit the *Downes*.

By 10 a.m., after the second wave of 167 planes departs from the island — sans their minimal losses — the attack is over.

Shortly after, Emond continues his work as a stretcher-bearer topside, allowing him to see a different version of the tranquil panorama he is used to. "All the ships were burning and the smoke and the fire."

In total, the *Pennsylvania* has lost 31 aboard — 18 sailors and six Marines from her crew and another seven sailors from five other ships.

Three of the seven were part of a group sent from the destroyer *Tracy* to help fight fires, and one had been away



from the harbor and, upon arriving, hopped onto the closest ship to help in the defense. It's not clear why the other three were aboard.

But the Pennsylvania's full band is safe. In fact, besides those on the Arizona, the only other player Emond remembers hearing about as a casualty is one from the battleship California. That man had been blown off the stern of the ship in an explosion, breaking his ankles.

Though the planes have left, in the minds of the survivors, the attack could very well continue, be it by air, sea or land. So about mid-afternoon, Emond receives orders to put on dark trousers, a long-sleeve sweater, a stocking cap and black shoes — all meant to be camouflage.

He and his bandmates are also issued ammunition and M1 Garand rifles, which they aren't accustomed to wielding.

"When they handed it to us, none of us knew how to get the clip inside the top of the rifles," Emond says. "So we stopped a Marine who was running through, and he showed us how to

get the clip inside."

Eventually that day, the band is put on guard duty along the dock, with Emond taking the midnight-to-2 shift.

But thankfully for the U.S. forces there, the attack against Hawaii didn't extend beyond that fateful morning.

Thirteen days afterward, the still-seaworthy Pennsylvania headed for San Francisco for repairs, which took only a few months. She then trained and went on patrols.

But she wouldn't see actual combat until May 1943, when she joined the U.S. effort to retake Attu and Kiska in Alaska's Aleutian Islands.

Emond does recall, though, the Pennsylvania being at a distance from, and available for, the major 1942 battles of Coral Sea and Midway. During Midway, he said, the Pennsylvania was the only ship between the battle and the West Coast.

At Attu in May 1943, she bombarded Japanese positions on the island. She did the same at Kiska that August, but upon landing, the Americans discovered that the Japanese had

Emond (conducting below and as a young sailor at right) continues to serve today at 98 years old as a Red Cross volunteer at Pensacola Naval Hospital.



“When they handed it to us, none of us knew how to get the clip inside the top of the rifles, so we stopped a Marine who was running through, and he showed us how to get the clip inside.”

already abandoned the island.

As the ship fired, everyone onboard braced themselves on the ground because of the immense recoil from the massive turret guns, Emond remembered.

While at sea, Emond held two jobs besides musician: lookout and postal worker. At the ship's post office, sailors, who were paid in cash, would use money orders to send funds back home, Emond said.

After the Aleutians, the Pennsylvania's band was sent stateside — to Naval Air Station Pensacola — because the players had been away for the required amount of time.

Then, in the spring of 1944, they were sent to the European Theatre to serve as the band for the U.S.'s Mediterranean fleet, which picked up the formal name it carries today, the Sixth Fleet, a few years after the war.

As the Allies made progress in Italy and eventually France, the band — which wasn't assigned to a specific ship — traveled around those countries, Algeria, Greece and Morocco. They played at city parks, embassies, ceremonies, funerals and other places and events.

They were in Naples, Italy, when the war in Europe ended in May 1945, and Emond recalls playing a lengthy concert at Sixth Fleet headquarters there to celebrate.

He had enough points to return to the U.S. rather than head back to the Pacific, where fighting continued into August.

But he wouldn't leave the service until a couple of decades after.

Right after the war, he became a band leader at Washington D.C.'s Navy School of Music, where between roughly 400 and 500 student musicians from all military branches would be

76





cycling through at any time.

“They had to be auditioned to get in there to start with,” Emond said. “You had to be a very proficient player.”

Band leading and teaching for the Navy would take him around the country, including another stint at Pearl Harbor for about a year, before he left the service in 1968 as a chief warrant officer.

“I would’ve stayed another 10 [years], but they wouldn’t let me,” he said. “I had to retire.”

Emond’s final years in the service had him stationed again at Naval Air Station Pensacola, and less than a week after he retired, he got called in for a civilian job there as the marina manager. He remained in that position for another 10 years before really retiring in 1978.

Emond, who has been married thrice and has a large family, continues his work for the Navy even today by volunteering twice a week for the Red Cross at Pensacola Naval Hospital. He didn’t make the trip to Oahu in December for Pearl



LOT'S OF TREASURE'S FROM THE PAST!
Open Friday, Saturday & Sunday 8-4pm

Chiefland

FARMER'S FLEA MARKET

We have something for everyone! Young and Old.



FRESH PRODUCE

- GENUINE LEATHER SHOP
- JEWELRY
- CHRISTIAN BOOK STORE
- GROCERIES
- COMPUTER REPAIR
- TOOLS
- CHILDREN'S CLOTHING
- ANTIQUES COLLECTABLES
- R.V. PARK
- WEATHER KING SHEDS

2 RESTAURANTS WITH HOME COOKED MEALS

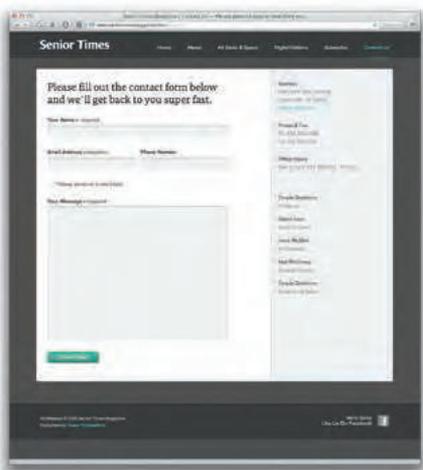
PHONE & DIRECTIONS 352-493-2022
1206 N YOUNG BLVD. (US 19) CHIEFLAND, FL 32636

FROM GAINESVILLE - JONESVILLE: FROM HIGH SPRINGS - ALACHUA:
TAKE S.R. 26 TO TRENTON, TAKE S.R.41 TO S.R. 26 TO TREN-
THEN 129 SOUTH TO U.S. 19 N. TON THEN 129 SOUTH TO U.S.
FLEA MARKET ON THE LEFT. 19 N. FLEA MARKET ON LEFT

WWW.CHIEFLANDFLEAMARKET.COM

Advertise Here

for as little as \$479 per month!



Senior Times

To request more information and a copy of the rate card, please contact us through our website or call 352-372-5468.

www.seniortimesmagazine.com

Harbor's 75th anniversary ceremonies, which were attended by several other survivors, including four of the five living Arizona crewmen.

He did go in 2011 for the 70th, though, along with five other Pearl Harbor survivors from Pensacola — an event chronicled in the book "Pearl Harbor Honor Flight: One Last Goodbye."

Three of those six — Emond; Navy pilot Cass Phillips, who was featured in Senior Times' December issue; and Marine William Braddock — are still living.

Emond said 2011's ceremonies disappointed him because Honolulu is no longer the two-hotel town of his sailor days.

"It was nice. We saw everything, but it was very crowded," he described. "It was hard to find any place that you remember 'cause it had modern highways going all over the place and traffic was heavy and the beaches and all had high rises and swarms of people."

When reflecting on Pearl Harbor today, Emond centers his discussions on the same theme as many other survivors: the unpreparedness of the U.S.

"We knew that we were going to have a war over there, but we were like taking a club against a group that had machine guns," he said, specifically noting how outdated the ships were. "We were just not ready."

University of Florida history professor George Esenwein approaches the attack today from a broader perspective, too.

A teacher of World War II courses, Esenwein parallels Pearl Harbor to the Sept. 11 attacks in terms of failures of intelligence, government agencies not working cooperatively on intelligence, and the race-based persecution that befell the innocent in the fallout.

He specifically referenced the Japanese internment camps the U.S. instituted after Pearl Harbor.

"I think what happens as we look back on wars is that it gets murkier instead of clearer — that we can, on the one level, certainly honor people who were brave enough to survive these sorts of occurrences, but at the same time, we need to keep in mind that these things unleashed a lot of other things that we couldn't cope with very easily," Esenwein said.

"I think maybe Pearl Harbor should serve as a lesson for that: that it's something that's a sad day, but it's one that should remind us that our responses to these things are as important as the events themselves."

Yet regardless of the ramifications, the attack itself remains the hardest day Emond said he's ever had to go through. Despite the struggles, though, he maintains that he isn't a hero.

"I think there were a lot of people just the same as me or you, and you were doing a job and you just did what you were supposed to do is all," he said. "No fuss about it." ■

MUST SEE

at Least Once in Your Lifetime



"If heaven is the way we saw it tonight, count me in!"

— Nathaniel Kahn, Renowned Filmmaker

神韻晚會 2017 SHEN YUN

**"There is a higher order;
there is a higher calling,**

and I think Shen Yun has illustrated that very, very nicely. I like that part very much. I identify that's one of the best things about humanity, that we realize that there's more than just us. Tears came to my eyes; it was just so incredible."

— Russell Yost, Professor, University of Hawaii at Manoa

BOOK YOUR TICKETS TODAY

- All-new 2017 program
- 100+ world-class performers
- 400 sets of exquisite hand-crafted costumes
- Stunning animated digital projection
- Mesmerizing music by Shen Yun live orchestra
- 5-continent, 30-country world tour

Jan 24–25, 2017 Phillips Center, Gainesville
ShenYun.com/FL or call 888.974.3698