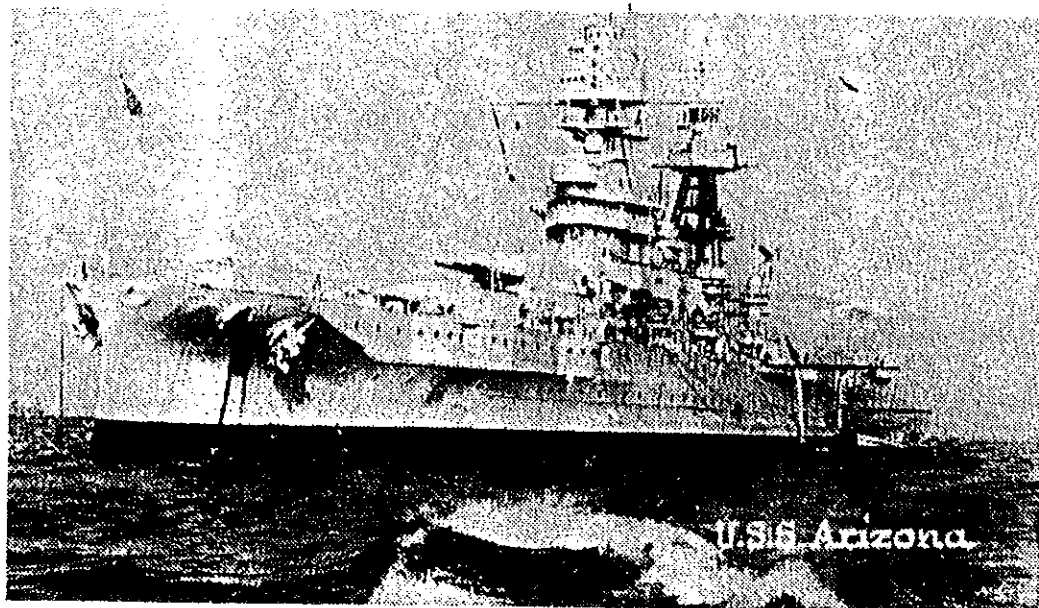




U.S.S. ARIZONA

TOUR OF DUTY REMEMBRANCES

DECEMBER 7, 1940 - DECEMBER 7, 1941

BY

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I was assigned to the USS Arizona out of the Great Lakes Naval Center outside of Chicago, Illinois. Our training had been cut short because of the Navy's need to bring all ships up to full complement. We had 120 men in the 91st Recruit Company at Great Lakes and, out of that number, most of us were assigned to the Arizona. Only the men who were going to schools for special training, or who were sick at the time of shipping out, didn't go with us.

It took us three days by a special troop train to get to Seattle, Washington. We arrived early (5:00 AM) on the fourth day and were taken from the train station to the ferry landing. We still looked like raw recruits, all lined up, waiting for the ferry to come. We took quite a ribbing from the "old salts" who were waiting with their girlfriends, and maybe some wives, to catch the ferry for Bremerton Shipyard.

After arriving aboard ship, they had us muster on the foss'cle (Forecastle deck) to be assigned to our

divisions. I was originally assigned to the "A" Division which was the motor mechanics, but I went to the engineering office and asked if I could be an electrician striker. They could see no problem with that, so I was then assigned to the "E" Division.

The "E" Division was made up of four sections: POWER, which was the maintenance of all electric motors; LIGHTING, which was the maintenance of all lighting circuits; IC OR INTERCOMMUNICATIONS, the maintenance of all telephone circuits; and POWER DISTRIBUTION, the maintenance of the four generators, the two switchboards and the testing of all electrical circuits. I was assigned to the power distribution gang and worked in that area until about September of 1941.

I had requested a change of duty to the lighting gang so I could broaden my knowledge of electrical work, never realizing at the time that this change would make me a survivor instead of a name listed in the shrine room at the USS Arizona Memorial. My battle station was also changed from the forward power

distribution room, which was located near the center of the ship five decks down, to the aft repair party, which was located outside the radio shack three decks down, next to the doorway leading down to the passageway between the #3 and #4 gun turrets.

The USS Arizona was in the shipyard at Bremerton, Washington being overhauled and generally cleaned up, repainted, etc. Since most shipboard routines stop during that period of time, I was assigned to a Navy yard welder. Whenever he had to weld on the bulkhead, deck, etc., it was my job to stand fire watch with a CO₂ extinguisher and put out any fires that might be caused by his welding. At the time I didn't care much for the job, thinking this wasn't going to make a sailor out of me. I found out later, when we had to chip paint, fire watching was a "racket".

We did a lot of chipping and painting on the Arizona, but I found out that that's what made our ship one of the best in the Navy. It was hard for me to believe that, had it not been for the threat of war, the

Arizona at 25 years old would have been de-commissioned.

All the crew thought a great deal of the ship and were very proud of the E's with hash marks on the stack and gun turrets. The hash mark was a sign of repeat performance. Once a year we had to prove our proficiency, always trying for the E's or hash marks.

After we left Bremerton, Washington, we first stopped at San Diego, California, then headed for Hawaii. I didn't do much on that trip over because I had gotten the mumps and was confined to an isolation ward. I'll never forget that ordeal either. My neck had been hurting me quite a bit, so I reported to sick call right after breakfast. I guess, since I was a new recruit on board, they thought I was "gold bricking" and just passed it off as a trick I was trying to pull on them. At any rate, a few days later, my neck began to swell and one of the first class electrician mates told me to go to the sick bay and "don't come back, or else". That day, I told the pharmacist

I could not go back to my division because they all said I had the mumps. Before it was all over, I had infected about 20 more men, so I wasn't thought of too highly.

When the doctor looked at me, he put me in the sick bay with the rest of the patients, still thinking I only had a sore throat. I told him I couldn't swallow the food. He said, "We'll put you on a soft diet." The next meal, I still got the same food. So I mentioned it to him and he said, "Eat only the soft foods."

By now, my mumps were really bad and some of the other men were starting to get the mumps too. When the doctor saw me again, he finally decided I had the mumps, put me in a special ward and restricted me to my bed. All in all, my first trip at sea was laying down. I saw Pearl Harbor for the first time out of a port hole.

Because the Arizona was an older ship, everyone slept either in a hammock or on cots. Each one of us had an assigned space. My first sleeping space was a

hammock. We had two hooks welded to the iron beams that supported the deck above. Putting up one end wasn't too bad -- you could just put the ring from your hammock webbing on the hook. But the other end had to be cinched up. This required a good pull and knot to keep the hammock from falling down on the men in the cots beneath. Usually the fellows sleeping under you would make sure the knot was going to hold you up.

To keep the hammock from folding around you, we made spreaders out of 1"x1"x16" sticks with a notch in each end to put in the two outside ropes on the webbing of the hammocks. In rough seas the hammock wasn't too bad to sleep in. In a few months I did get a cot which made that job a lot easier. Out of the 60 men in the "E" Division, the three of us who survived slept side by side on these cots.

Our daily routine started with reveille at 5:30 AM, breakfast at 6:30 AM, and the day's routine at 8:00 AM. For those who had the watch, they went according to their schedules. All of us had our jobs to do,

depending on the division you were in. When I was in distribution, we had to watch the load on board and add generators as needed. The midnight watch took megohm readings (a test of the insulation resistance of the circuits) on all the circuits and each morning gave the sheets to the chiefs in charge. They, in turn, saw to it that any needed repairs were done by their men.

The one job I didn't like in the power distribution was cleaning and painting the voids around the oil tanks for the ship's supply of fuel. The space was about 18" wide. Before we would go down there, the space had to be well ventilated. The painting didn't help a whole lot either -- the fumes could make you very dizzy. It usually took us the better part of the day to clean and paint these voids. We had two of these in our area.

When we went to sea, which was two weeks at a time, a good share of our time was spent at general quarters, practising our routines. When they had target practice, it wasn't always necessary to be at

general quarters, so we did get to watch that practice. The gunners on the Arizona were excellent. The anti-aircraft gunner got so good the Admiral had to ask them not to shoot at the sleeve that was being towed by a towplane, but shoot behind it. They didn't want to stop the practice because the tow airplane would have to take time out to get a new sleeve when it was shot off.

The turret gunners were the same. They would shoot at sleds being towed by a tug. It didn't take long and they sank the sled and had to continue practice by shooting at a destroyer's wake.

I spent the last three months in the lighting gang. I liked this work because it gave me access to the whole ship and a chance to meet more of the men throughout the ship. One day, Captain Van Valkenburgh called for a lighting electrician to replace some burned out lights in his cabin. I was dispatched to do this work. When I got to his cabin, there were two Marines standing guard at his door. They stopped me and made me state my

business in the area. When I had given them the information, one of them went into the Captain's cabin to clear my presence there. When the Marine came out of the cabin, he gave me clearance to go in. I thought, "If it takes all of this to get past two Marines, what must the Captain be like?" I was pleasantly surprised. Captain Van Valkenburgh was the most accommodating person I had met of all the officers on board. He asked me if I had ever been in a captain's quarters before. When I said no, he gave me a tour through his whole cabin. When I had seen everything, he said to me, "What did I call you for?" I told him, "To replace lights, Sir." He said, "I like to have them all tested at times." That was the only time I got that close to him.

In port, when we had the weekend duty, on my time off I liked to look the ship over. I had gotten to just about every area on the Arizona except the boiler rooms. As I remember, we had six of those, but I wanted to have one of the firemen show me that area for safety reasons.

Another area I was impressed with was the manual steering compartment. That required 16 men on 4 large ship's wheels to steer the ship. Rating didn't mean anything if it would have been necessary to do this job. The strongest men on the ship would be selected to take turns with this job. Fortunately, we never had to use the manual steering.

Our meals were served in the same compartment we slept in, so that meant we always had to answer reveille and get our compartment cleared of cots and hammocks. There were storage bins along the outside bulk head to stow our sleeping gear. The passageways contained our personal lockers which were about 14" wide by 20" high and 14" deep. We had all of our clothes and toilet articles in these lockers.

The mess cooks, who were the least senior men of each division, set up the tables and benches that were stored overhead in the compartment. While we were washing up for breakfast, the mess cooks got the food from

the galley in pots and platters. The food was served family style. We used heavy white porcelain plates and cups. The utensils were stainless steel.

The food was always very good. The senior rated man at each table was responsible for the conduct of the men at his table. After the food had been passed once around, you could ask for seconds if there was some left. When the food was passed, no one could take anything from the platter or pot without your permission. If anyone did, the senior man at the table would make them put it back. Most dinner meals included dessert of some kind, too. The mess cooks had to do the dishes, too, but that was done in the galley as I remember it.

There were movies in port on the fantail of the ship. The electrician mate with the schooling in operating the projector showed the movies from a special projector booth mounted alongside the number 3 turret on the port side. The officers and chiefs had chairs to sit on, but the enlisted

men had to stand on the deck. For a while, we used buckets to stand on so we could see better. But someone had to spoil that by using dirty oil buckets that stained the wooden decks. Anyone caught using a bucket was put on report after that.

It was either 1940 or 1941 that all capitol ships rated a band on board. This was really a great addition. They usually gave concerts before the movies and, very often, a select few would play during the noon hour. All of the band members were ammunition handlers during general quarters.

When we were in port and didn't have the duty, the men liked looking through their photo albums. The men who had been in the longest, and had seen many places, usually had the best photos to show and stories to tell.

Most of the men I talked to had joined the Navy to see the world, learn a trade and some to make it a career. The men were above average. We never had to worry about stealing or foul play. There just seemed to be

a code of ethics that everyone lived by. Before the war started, I thought I would spend most of my career on the USS Arizona.

We could either wash our own clothes or take them to the laundry. Each division had a certain day and time they could be dropped off. Anyone using the laundry bought a special knit laundry bag with their own tag on it. Most of us used the laundry for the convenience. Trying to dry wet laundry wasn't easy if there wasn't a space out of the way to hang it.

All the men who could go on liberty could answer liberty call when it was sounded. Before we could leave the ship, the officer of the deck had us line up in two rows so he could inspect us. Our uniforms had to be clean and pressed and our shoes polished. At this time the deck assistants would hand out our liberty cards. As we left the ship, we would first salute him and ask for permission to leave the ship. When he granted us permission, we then saluted the quarter-deck and went down the ladder to the launch that took us to the landing

pier. There was a short walk to the main gate where we showed our liberty cards again before boarding the buses that took us in to Honolulu.

The engineering wash room was just off our compartment in the middle of the ship. It was here where we could wash clothes, shower, shave, etc. The "head" was on the second deck forward in the bow of the ship.

On Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, our electrician's gang had just finished breakfast. My close friend, Kenneth Keniston, and I were standing by our lockers talking about what we would do on liberty that day. Kenny was putting on his whites to go to Catholic church service aboard the USS Nevada.

While we were talking by our lockers, a chief petty officer came running from the fireroom blower intake room, which was just off the electrician's compartment, shouting, "The Japs are attacking! Close all battleports and man your battle stations!" We were all stunned, until a first class electrician's mate said, "If it's so, let's do

it." No one said a word. We immediately started running for our battle stations.

When I got to my battle station, which was the aft repair party, the first explosion took place, knocking out all the lights. I tried calling my control station, but could not get an answer. In the darkness, I went for the doorway, which had a ladder on the other side leading down to the passageway between the number 3 and number 4 gun turrets. I straddled the opening of the doorway, waiting to see if the lights would come back on. At that moment, a terrific explosion took place that knocked me down the ladder in one big "swish". I landed on my feet at the doorway to the passageway, not knowing if I was hurt or not. I immediately checked my body for broken bones and bleeding. Since there was no light, I had to feel my body with my hands. Fortunately, I checked out okay.

When I stepped into the passageway, I was with about seven other men and three officers. The door to the base of the number three turret was dogged down for water

tightness below the water line, so this had to be opened. The explosion that had blown me down to this area had also consumed most of the oxygen in the air and our breathing became very difficult. Some of the men began to panic and began hitting the door with their hands. I dropped down to my knees and was able to push the lower four dogs open with my hands. Fortunately, someone else opened the upper four dogs and we were able to open the door just as we were about to collapse from the lack of oxygen. The good air on the other side of the door revived us all. We closed the door to save as much air as possible.

As we stood in the darkness at the base of number three turret, we felt our feet getting wet from water seeping into the compartment. We held a short meeting as to what to do, because we had not been ordered to abandon ship. It was decided that one of the officers should report our condition to the bridge. This officer climbed up through the gun turret as the rest of us waited for him to return with his orders.

After what seemed like an eternity, he returned and told us to abandon ship, that the ship was on fire and appeared to be completely destroyed.

We all climbed up through the gun turret and left the gun turret by way of the escape hatch located on the under-side of the overhang portion of the turret.

As I swung out of the escape hatch, I had forgotten this turret was several feet above the deck. I did manage to swing to the ladder mounted on the side of the gun turret and climbed down to the deck.

Fortunately for us, the wind was blowing towards the bow of the ship. The smoke was very thick and black from the burning oil and could have made breathing very difficult if the wind had been in the other direction.

Once we were all on the deck, we regrouped again and decided to take the raft off the gun turret and throw it over the side for something to hold on to as we swam for

shore. What we had all forgotten about was the oil on the water that was leaking from the ship. The oil was so thick on the water that it made it very hard to swim. The coating of oil on my skin made me tired, besides what I swallowed made me feel sick.

I knew I couldn't make it to shore so I swam for the aft quay. Again I was thankful to find two shipmates standing on the wooden bumper. They reached over and grabbed my hands, pulling me up just far enough to reach the top of the bumper. They told me I would have to make it the rest of the way by myself because there were others that needed help. Ordinarily, I would have dropped back into the water because I was so tired. But I knew my life depended on getting up on that bumper. With all the strength I could muster, I made the supreme effort and was able to pull and kick my way up to get on it.

I had no sooner gotten on the bumper when a 50 foot launch swung around by the quay. The coxswain told us to jump if we wanted to get aboard, that he did not have time

to stop. I jumped for one of the front seats, not giving too much thought at the time to breaking a limb. I figured that would be the least of my worries. When I hit the seat, the oil on my body made it almost impossible to stop! I almost slid right over the other side of the launch.

The coxswain headed for the landing at Ford Island. He said the Japanese planes were strafing the ships and the bay and that he couldn't stop to pick up any more men in the water. At that point, I threw everything I could get my hands on over the side, hoping the men left in the water would find something to help keep them afloat.

Once we got on the boat landing which was at the near end of Ford Island, we were taken to a shelter located under one of the houses not too far from the boat landing. Some mattresses had been put on the floor in one of the basement rooms so we could rest. But almost immediately, we were asked to leave the area so the women and children of Ford Island could lay down. I walked to the far end

of the basement, out on to a patio, where an officer took our name, rate and serial number. When most of that was completed, an officer and four or five of us went through some of the houses on Ford Island looking for men's clothes we could wear. All we had on at the time were our skivvies.

When we got some clothes on, we were taken to an airplane hangar on Ford Island to help make up 50 caliber machine gun belts. We were told that the planes off the Enterprise would be coming in to be armed. Everyone was told that the planes would be coming in with their lights on so that we would know they were our planes. But they still got shot at.

I stayed in the hangar Sunday night but didn't have a place to sleep except on the hangar deck. By morning I was so sick from the oil I had swallowed and the lack of sleep, that I turned in to sick bay at mess call on Monday AM.

MONDAY: One of the pharmacists that had gone through boot camp with

me at Great Lakes was assigned to the hospital on Ford Island after his pharmacy training. He took me under his wing and helped me out a great deal.

The clothes I had taken the day before from one of the houses happened to belong to one of the doctors here at the sick bay. Somehow, he recognized his clothes and gave me a "royal chewing out" for taking them out of his house. I think he originally was supposed to check all of us over on his morning rounds, but he got so mad at me that he was about to put me on report and give me a court martial. Before he left the area, he picked up all his clothes, stormed out, and never did check us over. My pharmacist shipmate told me he would ask his friends to help me out with clothes and they all did.

TUESDAY: I still hadn't taken a shower or cleaned the oil out of my hair, so the pharmacist thought I had better get that job done. I didn't realize I was such a mess until I started to clean up. My hair was so full of oil I had to have one of the

pharmacists help me wash it out.

By this time, my lungs were in bad shape, too. I could only take half a breath before it felt like a knife was being stuck in my back. The pharmacist gave me an Indian water pipe with some medicine in it to breath into my lungs. That helped my breathing a great deal.

WEDNESDAY: I started to feel better so I was sent over to the receiving barracks that had been set up in the recreation hall. I was interviewed again so I could be reassigned to duty. At this time, we were given a postcard to fill out so we could notify our families of our condition. I also sent a short note to the family of my best friend and conveyed my sympathy to them.

The Navy was also in need of silhouettes of the Japanese planes that had attacked Pearl Harbor. They asked for help from those of us who had made model airplanes. I was just being assigned to a group to start making models when my name was called out for assignment to the USS Farragut, DD348.

That evening, after mess call, they sent all of us who were reassigned to ships to one of the ammunition ships to wait for our assigned ships to come back into port.

Since our stay was only temporary on this ship, we had to find a place on deck to sleep. We all took a life jacket that was stored overhead in the passageway to use for a pillow and went to sleep.

THURSDAY: About two o'clock in the morning, a boatswain mate came down the deck and gave us all a crack on our feet with a club (this by way of getting you up in a hurry) and told us to report to the ammunition hold. A destroyer was coming in to take on ammunition. Some of the men had been assigned to this destroyer, so they went aboard after the munitions were all aboard. The rest of us went back to our life jackets and slept until it was time for breakfast.

FRIDAY: It must have been close to 10 AM when the USS Farragut sent a whale boat over for me. Since I had been an electrician's striker on board the USS Arizona

and had made that my choice in my reassigning interview, I went aboard the USS Farragut as an electrician mate's striker too. I was immediately introduced to the chief electrician's mate. He wanted to know all about my experiences on board the USS Arizona.

I spent one year to about the day on board the Arizona. The ship was a great loss to the navy in both manpower and vessels. We can only wonder what part she would have played in the war. The USS Arizona Memorial will always be a reminder to all of us of the sacrifices that were made on December 7, 1941. May we remember the price that was paid for Peace.

B I O G R A P H Y

Herbert V. Buehl, born January 20, 1922 in Monroe, Wisconsin.

Enlisted in the U.S. Navy October 8, 1940.

Recruit training at Great Lakes, Illinois.

Served aboard the following ships:

U.S.S. ARIZONA BB39, 12/8/1940-12/7/41

Received the Asiatic-Pacific Area Service Medal.

Survivor

1 Star/Pearl Harbor 12/7/41

U.S.S. FARRAGUT DD348, 12/15/41-5/21/43

1 Star/Coral Sea 5/4/42-5/8/42

1 Star/Guadalcanal-Tulagi Landings (including first salvo) 8/7/42-8/9/42

1 Star/Eastern Solomons (Steward Island) 8/23/42-8/25/42

1 Star/Aleutians Operation, Komandorski Island, 3/26/43

1 Star/Submarine Assessment, Pacific, 5/12/43

U.S.S. SC 1295, Sub Chaser, 8/12/43-6/44

Operated in the Miami, Florida and Gulf of Mexico Area

Put ship in commission

U.S.S. ATA 201, Auxiliary Tug Attack, 9/11/44-10/1/46

Operated in Central Pacific Ocean as far as the Philippine Islands, Okinawa and Japan

Covered landings at Wakayama, Japan, October 9, 1945

Put ship in commission

Left the ATA 201 at New Orleans, Louisiana for Great Lakes, Illinois and was given leave October 6, 1946 until November 6, 1946 at which time my discharge took effect.

MARRIED Helen Voss September 3, 1949. Have four children.

Worked for Wisconsin Bell for thirty-eight (38) years and four (4) months.

Retired November 30, 1985.

Live in Beloit, Wisconsin

Respectfully submitted,

Herbert V. Buehl
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