

POOL REPORT

DECEMBER 7, 1975

USS Arizona Memorial Ceremony

The Presidential arrival which was scheduled to coincide with the actual hour of the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, 7:55 was delayed briefly because of an engine fire aboard the launch. The pool was transferred to another launch in mid voyage and the President arrived at 7:57 a.m. on the Admiral's barge. He was piped aboard the Memorial. The Memorial lies athwart the hulk of the Arizona which lies just off the shore of Ford Island in the middle of the harbor. The location at the time of the attack was known as Battleship Row. The only remains of the ship that can be seen above water are a rusted ventilator and the mount for gun turret Number 3 and the hulk contains the remains still of more than 1,000 sailors who are among 1,500 aboard the Arizona on the day of the attack. Of that number, 289 survived. Among those entombed there also are an Admiral and a Marine.

The ceremony was built around a presentation of floral wreaths by 37 veterans and civic organizations. The President after his arrival gave his speech. And then proceeded 80 feet to the western end of the assembly room where a large glass encased model of the Arizona stood and placed his wreath which was white carnations and Hawaiian orchids, 32 inches in diameter. It said In Memoriam, December 7, 1941. Just before the President presented his wreath, a color guard of two sailors and two marines raised the U. S. flag on a flagpole which attached to the original main mast of the ship. It is the only uncommissioned ship in the Navy allowed to fly the colors. Bugler Four trumpeters sounded an attention call and then played the Star Spangled Banner and then another call entitled Carry On. After the President had presented his wreath, the representatives of the various organizations led first by Admiral Maurice F. Weisner, Commander in Chief of the U. S. Pacific Fleet presented a wreath which was placed to the right of the President's and he was followed by Lt. Gen. John N. McLaughlin, Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force-Pacific. He placed his wreath to the left of the President's. The remainder of the ceremony consisted of the placing of the other wreaths by the representatives of the other various organizations and their wives and other guests who were in attendance.

In all, approximately 250 people were on hand in the memorial which is an alabaster white somewhat modernistic structure, with three rooms consisting of a museum, an assembly room, where the ceremony was held and a shrine, on whose wall is listed the names of sailors and marines who died aboard the Arizona. The memorial was authorized in 1958, built with federal and state funds and public contributions. It was dedicated on Memorial Day, 1962. Among the organizations present was one made up of Pearl Harbor survivors, men who had served on a base that day. One of them was Richard Fiske, 53, formerly of San Diego, who is now in Honolulu. He offered an eye witness remembrance of the explosion and sinking of the Arizona -- "I was aboard the West Virginia (another battleship). We were in front of the Arizona. We took several torpedoes. I saw the Arizona hit, then about 5 minutes later it exploded. It lifted up out of the water and I saw sailors and marines thrown off. When the attack came I went to my battle station on the bridge next to the Captain. He was hit and killed by machine fire about 9:00. The main thing I remember is the face of a Japanese on an attack fighter that flew by at about 60 or 70 feet on a torpedo run. There were two Japs in the plane. The one on the right looked out of the cockpit window and smiled at me, as if he was saying Ah ha I got you. He was young and had a mustache. I can still see that face. I would recognize him today." Fiske was 18 years old at the time. The ceremony took place under a sunny bright sky. The harbor was very quiet. A handful of people stood watching on a distance from a shore on Ford Island. The Presidential party included Mrs. Ford and Brent Scowcroft, Governor and Mrs. George E. Aiyoshi, and Senator Hiram Fong. There was no applause when the Presidential party entered the assembly hall nor when he left at 8:20 a.m. He was piped back aboard the barge at 8:24 a.m. for the short run to the mainland.

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Just before the President's arrival, a World War II vintage trainer plane called the 'Texas' buzzed the Memorial. No one seemed to know where it came from. Before the President's arrival, 5 navy scuba divers made a security check of the waters around the memorial, including those over the hulk itself.

The local people attribute the good weather to the fact that a Honolulu policeman, Fred Kukonu, had cast Hawaiian salt and ti leaves on the water around the memorial the night before. He has done this for each ceremony for the last 13 years and they have never had rain.

Some background on the attack itself. The total of 2,341 American fighting men were killed and another 1,143 wounded. Of the 97 ships in Pearl Harbor that day, 18 were sunk or damaged. Three of the sunken ships were battleships. Four other battleships were severely damaged. The Japanese attacked in three waves and five directions.

President Ford is the first President to attend the December 7 Memorial Service; however, Presidents Johnson and Kennedy have visited the Memorial and Ford was here as Vice President. The pool has put in a request for information on what Gerald Ford was doing on this date in 1941. The White House Press Office says it will have that later.

Ford was introduced at the ceremony by Admiral Noel Gayler, Commander in Chief, Pacific.

Al Blanchard, Detroit News
Phil Jones, CBS
Bill Ringler, Gannett

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