

REMEMBERING PEARL HARBOR

Haunting memories stay with survivors

■ Need for vigilance a vital lesson, veterans say.

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STAFF WRITER

Dec. 7, 1941, is not a distant memory for Leo Dabrowski.

He lived through the surprise attack by Japanese aircraft on the U.S. Pacific Fleet anchored in Pearl Harbor, which claimed about 2,400 lives and drew the United States into World War II.

A collage on the door to Dabrowski's room at St. John's Home in Rochester serves as a daily reminder of what President Franklin D. Roosevelt called "a date which will live in infamy."

Under the caption "Bloody Sunday: The Lines of Attack," a map shows where eight battleships were damaged or destroyed.

Next to the map is a news report with photos of smoke billowing from the ships. Another article quotes Dabrowski saying: "I was really shocked by what I

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ANNETTE LEIN staff photographer

Leo Dabrowski will join other veterans for a Pearl Harbor ceremony today.

Pearl

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saw.”

Dabrowski is one of more than 15 Pearl Harbor survivors known to be living in the Rochester area. Some share a strong conviction that this date has a lesson of great relevance today — that a nation must be ever vigilant — and that the carnage of Dec. 7 in Hawaii is an unsettling reminder of the horrors of war.

Dabrowski was stationed on one of the battleships — the USS Maryland, which was hit by bombs but ready for a return to service in less than three months.

Now 92, Dabrowski's recollection of the past has faded somewhat with time. But the shock of seeing 181 Japanese fighters and dive bombers fill the skies remains a haunting memory.

“I thought they were going to bomb my battleship until it sunk,” recalled Dabrowski, who was a pharmacist's mate in the Navy.

This morning, Dabrowski with two of his sons will join other local veterans at a 7:55 a.m. ceremony at the flagpole outside the Rochester Yacht Club for a Pearl Harbor remembrance ceremony, organized by the American Legion Greece Post 468.

“He gets emotional about all the people who died. He is representing all the people who didn't make it back,” said his oldest son, Tom Dabrowski, 57, of Hamlin.

Among the other local ceremonies today are a 2 p.m. interfaith prayer Pearl Harbor remembrance ceremony in the Building 5 auditorium of the Canandaigua Veterans



Provided photo

Leo Dabrowski was stationed on the USS Maryland when Japan attacked on Dec. 7, 1941.

Affairs Medical Center and a gathering between 9:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. at the Bagel Bin Café in Brighton for reminiscing about Pearl Harbor.

As has become a family tradition, Dabrowski's youngest son, Brian, flew in from Dallas to be with his father on Pearl Harbor Day. Other local survivors also are expected to be at the Yacht Club ceremony.

“We are not going to forget them,” said Walter Samolio, 90, of Rochester, who was a corporal with the U.S. Marines at Pearl Harbor at the time of the attack.

Joseph E. Bringley, 88, of Greece is another Pearl Harbor survivor who has attended this commemoration.

On the morning of the attack, Bringley heard booming sounds while attending Sunday Mass in a church on a hill overlooking the harbor.

He thought the noise was practice rounds fired by Navy ships, but reality set in when a soldier ran into the church shouting: “We've been hit.”

The full extent of the death and destruction only became apparent to Bringley several days later when he saw trucks carrying some of the dead for burial.

Bringley believes that the need for vigilance is an important lesson of Pearl Harbor, but he also was left with a strong distaste for war. “Keep America alert — but pursue peaceful means,” said Bringley, who was a sergeant with the Army at the time of the attack.

Both Samolio and Bringley belong to the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, a national group that promotes the importance of Pearl Harbor.

The memories of Pearl Harbor also remain vivid — 68 years after the fact — for John Vanden Brul, 91, who was a Navy seaman on the hospital ship USS Solace at Pearl Harbor and now lives at St. Ann's Home in Irondequoit.

On the morning of Dec. 7, Vanden Brul was shaving when he saw a Japanese plane fly by — apparently on its way to bomb the nearby USS Arizona.

When Vanden Brul went to the back of his ship, he could see a big plume of smoke emerging from the Arizona.

A total of 84,168 uniformed military personnel were in the area of Pearl Harbor on that fateful day, said Bill H. Muehleib of Virginia Beach, Va., vice president of the national survivors group.

He estimates that about 18,000 Pearl Harbor survivors are alive today.

John Mueller, former University of Rochester professor who is now professor of political science at Ohio State University and author of *War, Presidents and Public Opinion*, said that the essential message of Pearl Harbor is that “you still want to be prepared for surprises.”

But the attack on Sept. 11, 2001, Mueller added, shows that surprises still do happen. □

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TOM DABROWSKI,

son of Leo Dabrowski, a Pearl Harbor attack survivor