



Face of Fillmore

By Sherry Shepard
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December 7, 1941 – a day that will always be remembered all over the world. On that date, Pearl Harbor was bombed with a huge loss of life and ships and the United States entered World War II.

The question of the day: Where were you when you heard that news? Understandably, the majority of Fillmore citizens were not even alive when this event happened but those who were remember their thoughts, what they were doing when they found out and the impact it had on their lives.

To mention a few:

Robert Hall tells that he was just a school boy and was walking to school in Iowa when he was told the news. (The actual event happened on Sunday.) He remembers thinking that at his age, the war would be over before he was old enough to be involved, but as it turned out, he was part of the occupation forces that went to Japan and to China.

Greta Stevens was celebrating her 13th birthday that day. She and her brothers had gone ice skating after church services near their home not far from Cardston, Alberta, and came home happy and excited. As they entered their home, their father told them to be quiet and listen to the radio broadcast that was telling about the day's terrible events.

Greta's husband Paul had been hunting geese at Clear Lake and came home to the news on the radio. He later joined the Navy and served in the Pacific.

Jack McBride, who was 14 years old at the time, tells that he doesn't really remember much else of the day except listening to the radio, hearing the news of the devastation and of President Roosevelt declaring war. People anxiously watched the news reels at the movies each week. He says many of the young men of our area volunteered. He said that the volunteers and farm boys won the war because they went with the intent to see it finished as quickly as possible. He also remembers when he was in high school and the big celebration in Fillmore because Japan had surrendered

Several others in our community would tell similar stories. The world was in shock.

One of the ships sunk that day at Pearl Harbor was the *USS Utah*.

The *USS Utah* has a long history. It was the second and final member of the Florida class of dreadnought battleships and had one sister ship, the *Florida*. The *Utah* was built in New York and launched in December, 1909. The ship was christened by Mary Alice Spry, the 18-year-old daughter of Utah's Governor William Spray.

Traditionally, when a ship was named after a state, that state would buy a set of sterling silver serving ware to be used by the captain when he entertained dignitaries. Utah was no exception. The school children of the state donated \$2700 toward this and the Legislature appropriated the rest of the funds.



U.S.S. Utah in 1909

U.S.S. Utah/Pearl Harbor

On the cold morning of November 6, 1911, 500 people from Utah came to present the silver service. Two hundred of them were members of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir who performed the national anthem.

After the ship was decommissioned, the silver service was returned to the State of Utah and is now in the governor's mansion along with other memorabilia including the captain's clock and the U.S. flag that were fished out of the bay after the disaster.

History tells us that these two ships, the *Utah* and the *Florida*, were the first to arrive during the United States occupation of Veracruz in 1914 during the Mexican Revolution. After the American entrance into World War I, *Utah* was stationed in Bantry Bay, Ireland, where she protected convoys from potential German surface raiders. Throughout the 1920s, the ship conducted numerous training cruises and fleet maneuvers, and carried dignitaries on tours of South America twice, in 1924 and 1928. In 1931, *Utah* was converted into a target ship. She was also equipped with numerous anti-aircraft guns to train gunners for the fleet. She served in these two roles for the rest of the decade. Late 1941 found the ship in Pearl Harbor. She was in port on the morning of December 7. In the first minutes of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, she was hit by two torpedoes, causing serious flooding. The *Utah* quickly rolled over and sank; the vast majority of her crew were able to escape, but 64 men were killed in the attack with the remains of all but four still there. The wreckage of the ship is still in the harbor just off Ford Island and in 1972 a memorial was erected nearby.



U.S.S. Utah listing to one side before sinking at Pearl Harbor

Perhaps one of the most interesting stories about the *USS Utah* happened 60 years later when a funeral service for Nancy Lynne Wagner, who died at birth, was held at Pearl Harbor, on the site of the *USS Utah*. Baby Nancy's father, Chief Yeoman Albert Wagner, was attached to the *Utah* at the time of the attack. Wagner had planned to scatter Nancy's ashes at sea when *Utah* left Pearl Harbor, but he never had the chance. Wagner survived the attack and remained in the Navy until 1952. He passed away in 1975 and was buried at sea off San Diego. Baby Nancy's urn is still in her father's locker aboard the *Utah*. Her twin sister Mary and other relatives were there for the services, which her father had planned to have taken place years before.