



# OBON SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER

December 2024

### Pearl Harbor Stories

#### Ed Johann: Part Three

Ed Johann was below deck keeping an eye on the oil pressure of the noisy engine. Another crewman was in the bow of the skiff and the steersman was at the helm, guiding the craft directly across the harbor. Everything was going great. Suddenly Ed thought he heard a commotion but because of the loud motor, he didn't know what was going on.

When he stuck his head up he saw the sky full of airplanes. He asked, "*What are those guys doing?*" unaware they were not American planes.



A Japanese pilot's view of Pearl Harbor under attack.

With bombs and torpedos dropping the helmsman immediately whipped the skiff around and raced back to the USS Solace. This shopping trip was over.

After the nurses and doctors were safely unloaded these crewmen steered their skiff directly into the battle. Sailors were jumping off from the sinking ships into the water. Ed and the other crewman pulled them aboard, one after the other, until they nearly swamped. Other men grabbed ahold of the side of the skiff. They immediately steered back to the Solace to drop off these rescued sailors.

Back and forth they traveled, one load after the other.

When Ed described those hours of December 7th he talks about the floating oil that made everything so slippery. And he talks about how the Japanese planes dove straight down out the sun; "*You could hear them but couldn't see what was coming.*" But mostly he laments about how he didn't possess physical strength. He wasn't strong enough to pull a soaking-wet, full-grown man out of the water. This single regret seemed to be his greatest memory of the day. He was not able to rescue more people because he didn't have the strength.



Ed and his crew were the among the first of the rescue boats. As the day wore on many other small boats arrived to rescue stranded sailors.

Ninety minutes after the attack began the Japanese were gone. Ed and his boat crew continued to ferry rescued men to the USS Solace; the doctors and nurses were overwhelmed by the injured.

That night Ed slept on the deck of the Solace with thousands of other men. They didn't have beds or blankets; everything was being used

A couple days later the **USS Wright** returned to Pearl Harbor with the **USS Lexington** fleet. The crew was amazed at what had happened while they were gone.

But even more, the captain and crew of the USS Wright were amazed that one of their crewmen, the skinny kid no one could remember seeing, was suddenly a hero with letters arriving from senators and admirals and award ceremonies.

After the awards and medals Ed's service during WWII was non-eventful. He worked on engines, kept them running and changed the oil.

For most people, witnessing the attack on Pearl Harbor was enough excitement to last their lifetime. For those who were actually involved, it was something they never stopped talking about. However, for Ed, it was just the *first chapter* of a long, long life.

*To be continued....*