

## Pearl Harbor (Continued)

They had to get the gun up a ladder into the airplane. So the petty officer got up the ladder, and Chuck somehow got the gun off the ground and up to him muzzle first. This is a really bad procedure for safety reasons. But the gun disappeared into the airplane. Chuck grabbed an ammunition canister and got it up the ladder into the airplane. Then he went down the ladder and repeated the operation. The Petty Officer had the machine gun in place and was locking it in firing position. The machine gun was then loaded.

Chuck looked up and another aircraft in a steep power dive was coming at them. It was the same old flashing lights and popping sounds. Chuck heard later that some of those bullets pierced the fuselage of the airplane they were in at the time. Chuck spun the gun into position and threw the breech open. Some more manipulations occurred. The Petty Officer pulled the trigger.

Chuck reasoned that the Petty Officer figured aiming wasn't required with a machine gun; just point at the general direction of the target and fire away.

Chuck watched as the machine gun bullets went harmlessly not near where that airplane was. That's when his country boy hunter instinct kicked into gear.

Chuck used to shoot Jack Rabbits on the run and Ring Necked Pheasants on the fly, not with a shot gun, but with a 22 caliber rifle. Chuck knew that you had to put that bullet where the target would be when the two of them came together.

Back in the country where Chuck was raised, you became a hunter and gatherer early in life. You also became a good shot. This ability determined whether you would or would not have food on the table.

Chuck asked to let him get the next one. Chuck got into position and looked up. There was another plane coming at him in a power dive. Chuck got a bead and a lead. Then he fired and watched some of those bullets pierce the fuselage of that dive bomber. With each tracer bullet there are four more regular bullets.

At this point you no longer watch that airplane. It has flown away and is no longer a threat. You watch for the next airplane coming at you. He spotted one not in a power dive but about two city blocks away, well within the range of a 50 caliber machine gun. The plane was making a left turn. Because of the left turn, Chuck could see the cockpit. Chuck figured he could get some bullets into the fuselage and maybe into the cockpit. If he could get some 50 caliber slugs bouncing around inside that cockpit, that pilot is going to really have something to think about besides coming back to machine gun you for a second time.

Chuck fired at the plane with six to eight rounds just forward of the cockpit. When they hit the plane, it rolled into a right turn and was gone from Chuck's field of fire. No more aircraft came by to bomb or strafe that end of the island that morning.

Usually, if the lead pilot comes back, then all of his wingmen will come back to strafe and bomb. On that morning, no airplanes came back. Chuck did fire at other aircraft on their way to or from other targets. A little later, a second wave of attacking aircraft came in as the USS Nevada came down the channel heading for open water. Those airplanes attacked the ship like a swarm of bees. If the ship could be sunk right there, it would block the harbor for some time. Chuck got to fire some short bursts at some of those aircraft as they passed through his limited field of fire on their way to or from the USS Nevada.

Chuck was watching a news program on the fiftieth anniversary of Pearl Harbor. Some of those active pilots who had participated in that raid, had survived the war, and were physically able to travel were located and brought to Pearl Harbor for that anniversary. They were being interviewed and asked about their experiences on that December day in 1941. They asked one man what part he had played in that raid. Chuck wished he had been there. The man said that he was the lead pilot in a group of nine aircraft, and their assigned target was the aircraft and hangars on Ford Island. He said that when he went in on his first run and he machine-gunned and dropped his bombs, it looked like the whole island was asleep. However, the pilot was surprised at how fast the hanger people reacted.

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By the time the pilot turned around and came in for a second machine gun run, there was so much fire coming up that he turned around and went elsewhere.

Chuck really wanted to talk to him. He was the man that dropped the first bomb on Pearl Harbor that morning. Chuck feels that he got to that man mentally with his on target 50 caliber machine gun fire and changed his mind about coming back and machine gunning them for the second time.

In 2010, Chuck, his wife, daughter, and son-in-law were at Pearl Harbor. There were about 100-115 other survivors there for that event. Many of the survivors had been back to Pearl Harbor many times. For Chuck, that was his first time back in 64 years. He was there in 1946 before being sent home, but he was still serving in the Navy. After going to the memorial service that morning and the re-dedication of the Visitor's Center, they went to the USS Arizona Memorial. Listed on the wall were the names of 1,177 crew members whose earthly remains are still aboard that vessel.

The next day they met with a naval historian that had been arranged in advance and they were able to visit areas of Ford Island that were restricted. Chuck got to stand at the spot where that first bomb fell on that early Pearl Harbor morning. Standing there, and thinking back, it was like events were happening all over again. So Chuck got away from there. He asked the historian if they could go in the building. There was work being done in the building, but the historian got them into it. Chuck wanted to get into that office he was in that morning typing the letter. The doors were welded shut because of instability. It is being restored and added to the historical areas on the island.

That morning, Chuck was a 17 year old sailor trying to be the very best military man that he could be. By the end of the day, he felt like a 34 year old combat veteran. Such an event can take away your youth quickly and age you prematurely.

Next, they walked to the back side of the hanger. Chuck pointed out that the color of the glass window panes that fell on him were different now. Chuck was also looking for the construction ditch. The historian was amazed. He had talked to many survivors, and Chuck was only the second survivor to ever mention that ditch. If Chuck had stayed in the ditch as he was ordered to do under threat of military discipline, he would not have been able to stand before us and relate his story as he did tonight.

When they got home from that 2010 trip, Chuck's wife encouraged him to start writing his experiences down before his remembrances disappeared so that his family would know what had happened to him. Chuck is still doing this. Chuck noted that he and his wife have been married for 62 years. Until Chuck made a presentation about his experiences in 2008, his 52 year old son had not known Chuck was a Pearl Harbor survivor.

Chuck still works in his shop performing jobs on an on call basis. Chuck noted that, as of April 3, 2016, he has been a working wage earning tax paying service providing productive contributing and self supporting member of his generation for 75 consecutive years.

Chuck noted the beacon on Mount Diablo that is lighted at dusk on December 7<sup>th</sup> and turned off at dawn on December 8<sup>th</sup> every year. He encouraged every audience member to observe this event each year. The Pearl Harbor Survivors organization observes it from the California State University East Bay campus now.

Chuck recited poetry about remembering those who served in the armed forces and remembering those who died protecting our freedoms.



Chuck Kohler with Charlene Abrams