



Remembering the USS *UTAH*

*The men we took out . . .
that were dying . . . some of
'em maybe thirty years old,
calling their mama.
That shakes you up.*

-John Eichman, WT2c

Our Duty to Protect

"I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies," was each man's oath aboard the battleship USS *Utah*. On the morning of December 7, 1941 they honored that promise. During a fierce, Japanese surprise attack the men of the *Utah* fought to protect their ship, their country and each other—but many could not protect themselves. They were shocked and frightened. They were brave and resourceful. They were young men who never went home. It now falls to us to protect their memories and honor their sacrifice.

We heard the shrapnel hitting the ground all around us.

-Tom Anderson Jr., ENS

For nearly twenty years the *Utah* served as a training ship, honing the skills of countless U.S. servicemen. The *Utah* acted as a remote control target for other warships, a stationary target for bombers, and a place where men sharpened their anti-aircraft gun marksmanship. Yet, on a ship solely dedicated to practice, rigor, and training—nothing could have prepared its men for the morning of December 7, 1941.

"I actually saw one of the Japanese planes come in, release the torpedo. . . Then I felt the. . . reverberation," remembers Clark Simons, MATt3c. Two torpedoes later, with the ship rolling over sideways, the men abandoned ship—they had to get above deck. Officers stopped them as they came up, protecting them from planes strafing the deck. "I seen lieutenant . . . killed right in front of me. . . with a machine gun," recalls John Eichman, WT2c. Wooden beams slid across the deck (above right) blocking exits and trapping men inside. They ran for the portholes; the smaller men squeezed through and slid down the ship's hull, their backs shredded by jagged barnacles.

More danger waited outside as the *Utah* slowly capsized. Huge timbers crashed off of the deck and onto the crew swimming for safety. Fighter planes mowed them down as they slid down lines and fled along the bottom of the ship. More fortunate men covered behind debris amidst the chattering rain of bullets.



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Massive timbers, placed on deck to protect the crew from practice bombs, slid off and crushed them in the water.

Back inside the *Utah*, a frothing, swirling, upside-down world of water engulfed the *Utah's* men. They fiercely pounded the walls in hope of rescue. S.A. Szymanski, MM1c heard their pounding, grabbed a blowtorch, and headed into the fray. Blocking out the gunfire, he followed their tapping, cut into the hull, and rescued John Vaessen, F2c. Szymanski later received formal commendation for his heroism.

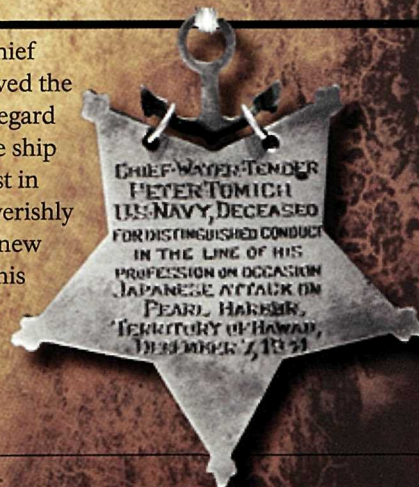
Others had no heroes. Clark Simmons remembers his friend George Smith, MATt1c, "He aimed to please. He was going to make the navy his career. . . he was machine gunned. . . he had bullet holes in his chest

Dying so Others Might Live



U.S. NAVY HISTORICAL CENTER # 79593

Among the heroes of the *Utah* was Chief Watertender, Peter Tomich. He received the Medal of Honor for courage and disregard of his own safety. Tomich realized the ship was capsizing, yet remained at his post in the engineering plant. He worked feverishly to stabilize the ship's boilers, for he knew an explosion would kill hundreds of his shipmates. After securing the boilers and hurrying those around him to safety, Tomich was out of time. He died inside the *Utah*, giving his life so others might live.

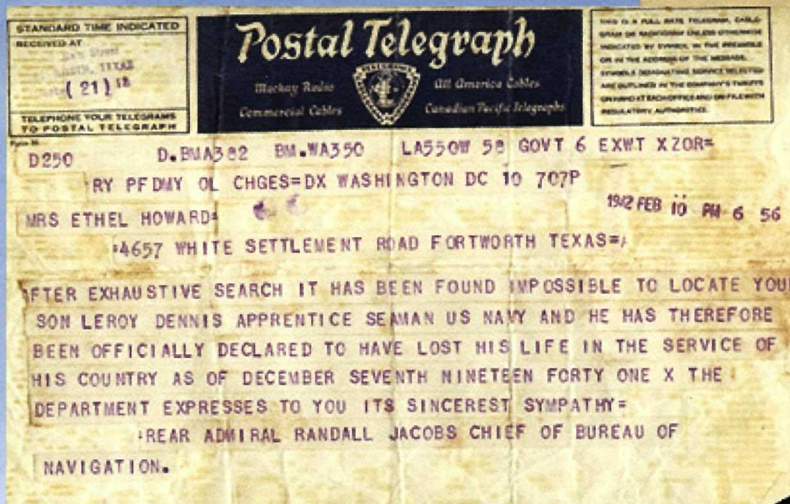


USAR PHOTO COLLECTION # 560

We Regret to Inform You . . .

. . . your boys are never coming home.

Death of Fort Worth Youth at Pearl Harbor Is Revealed

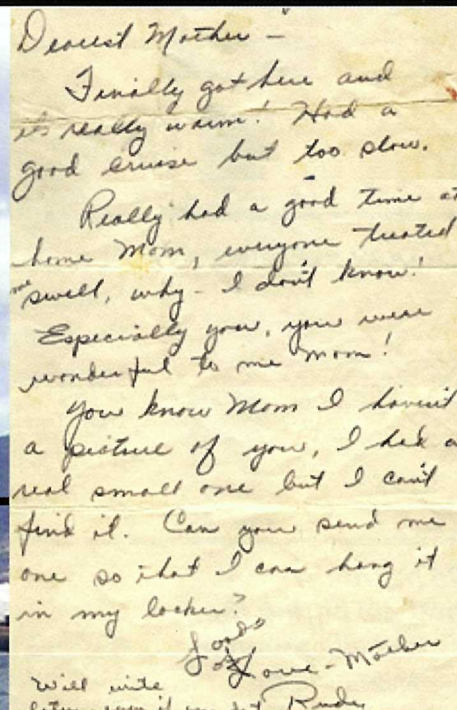


COURTESY BILLY SCRIBNER

Misery in an Envelope

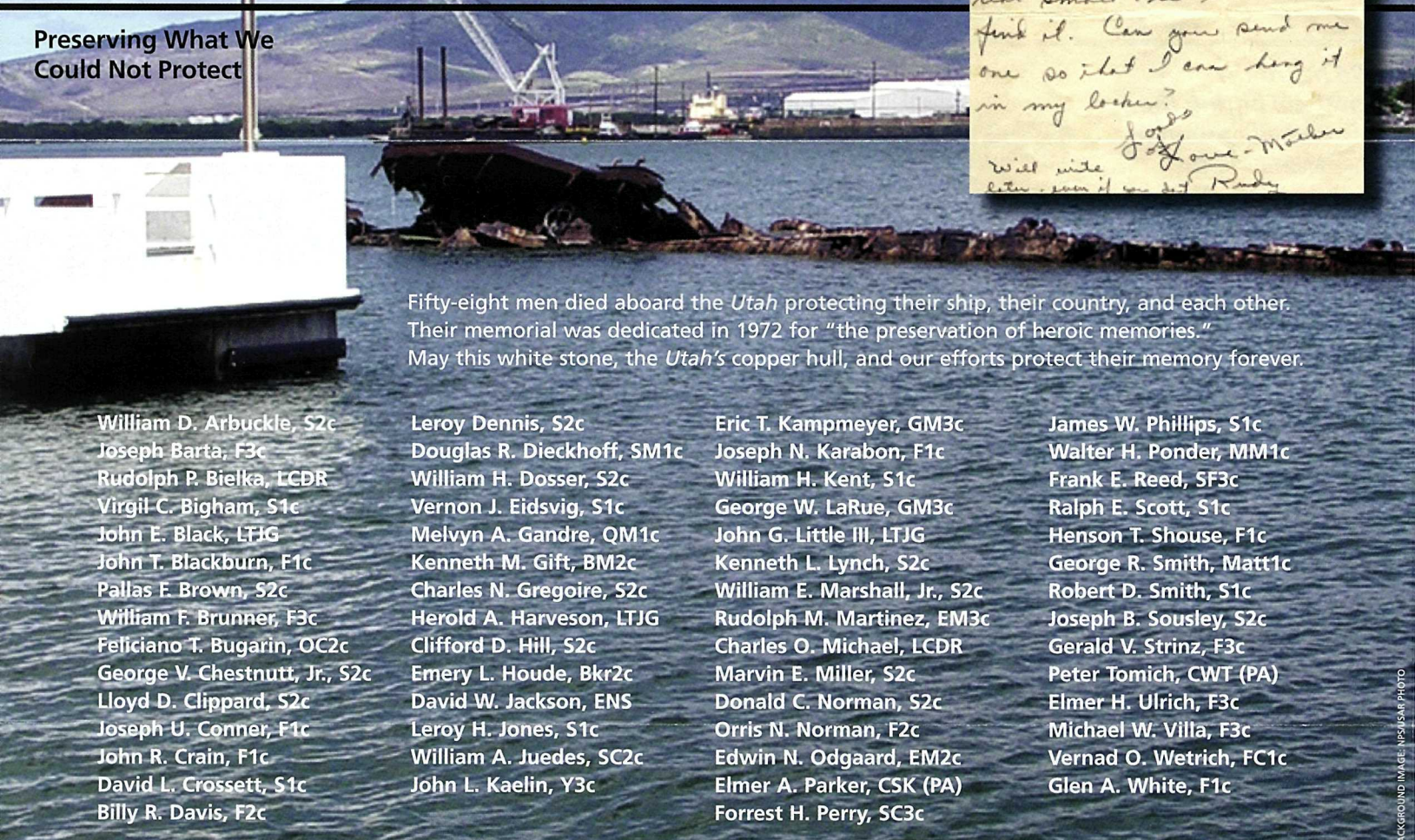
Families around the country could no longer protect their boys. They could merely wait for letters. Every trip to the mailbox, every ring of the doorbell, they hoped for something reassuring. Amelia Perez cherished her son's letter sent from Pearl Harbor in September 1941 (at right). Three months later, a navy telegraph arrived with much sadder news. Her boy, Rudy Martinez, was dead.

Amelia was not alone; telegraphs and newspaper articles about Leroy Dennis (above) and his shipmates arrived in communities across the country. Families in California, Iowa, New Hampshire, and beyond read their boys' names and saw their faces—and knew they were never coming home.



USAH COLLECTION 3418A

Preserving What We Could Not Protect



Fifty-eight men died aboard the *Utah* protecting their ship, their country, and each other. Their memorial was dedicated in 1972 for "the preservation of heroic memories." May this white stone, the *Utah's* copper hull, and our efforts protect their memory forever.

- William D. Arbuckle, S2c
- Joseph Barta, F3c
- Rudolph P. Bielka, LCDR
- Virgil C. Bigham, S1c
- John E. Black, LTJG
- John T. Blackburn, F1c
- Pallas F. Brown, S2c
- William F. Brunner, F3c
- Feliciano T. Bugarin, OC2c
- George V. Chestnutt, Jr., S2c
- Lloyd D. Clippard, S2c
- Joseph U. Conner, F1c
- John R. Crain, F1c
- David L. Crossett, S1c
- Billy R. Davis, F2c

- Leroy Dennis, S2c
- Douglas R. Dieckhoff, SM1c
- William H. Dosser, S2c
- Vernon J. Eidsvig, S1c
- Melvyn A. Gandre, QM1c
- Kenneth M. Gift, BM2c
- Charles N. Gregoire, S2c
- Herold A. Harveson, LTJG
- Clifford D. Hill, S2c
- Emery L. Houde, Bkr2c
- David W. Jackson, ENS
- Leroy H. Jones, S1c
- William A. Juedes, SC2c
- John L. Kaelin, Y3c

- Eric T. Kampmeyer, GM3c
- Joseph N. Karabon, F1c
- William H. Kent, S1c
- George W. LaRue, GM3c
- John G. Little III, LTJG
- Kenneth L. Lynch, S2c
- William E. Marshall, Jr., S2c
- Rudolph M. Martinez, EM3c
- Charles O. Michael, LCDR
- Marvin E. Miller, S2c
- Donald C. Norman, S2c
- Orris N. Norman, F2c
- Edwin N. Odgaard, EM2c
- Elmer A. Parker, CSK (PA)
- Forrest H. Perry, SC3c

- James W. Phillips, S1c
- Walter H. Ponder, MM1c
- Frank E. Reed, SF3c
- Ralph E. Scott, S1c
- Henson T. Shouse, F1c
- George R. Smith, Matt1c
- Robert D. Smith, S1c
- Joseph B. Sousley, S2c
- Gerald V. Strinz, F3c
- Peter Tomich, CWT (PA)
- Elmer H. Ulrich, F3c
- Michael W. Villa, F3c
- Vernad O. Wetrich, FC1c
- Glen A. White, F1c

BACKGROUND IMAGES: NPS/SHAW PHOTO

Visiting the *Utah*

The USS *Utah* Memorial (shown above) is located on Ford Island, within Pearl Harbor Naval Station. Access is restricted on this active military base. Active Duty/Retired Military, Military Reservists or DOD/Civil Service personnel with a valid DOD ID card and vehicle decal can visit the memorial. If a member does not have a DOD decal, they must obtain a vehicle pass. Anyone not affiliated with the Military/Civil Service that would like to visit the memorial must be sponsored by someone who is.

For current visitor information contact the Navy Public Relations Office at (808) 473-2888.



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