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Remarks on Pearl Harbor Day at Landmark Center Dec 7, 2014

These can also be found at <http://www.outsidethewalls.org/blog/2014/12/07/>

I am one of very few Americans today who can honestly say they actually physically met one of those killed aboard the USS Arizona, Dec. 7, 1941. My last meeting with Uncle Frank Bernard was at the end of June, 1941, five months before he died. I was one year old. I have the photo to prove it!

The constellation of each and every victim that fateful Sunday, carry their own stories, in various ways.

Here's some fragments of mine.

Frank served on the Arizona for six years. He was a shipfitter. Getting in the Navy was an accomplishment during the Depression. He seemed headed for a career in the Navy, but then there's that letter he typed aboard the Arizona on "Nov 7 1941" (a Friday) where he asks his brothers advice: I think I will get hitch to that little girl up in Washington she is a honey...what do you think of that..?

I don't know when that letter arrived back in ND.

There's that family picture I have, taken in late June, 1941, at Long Beach, of the entire family - there were 7 at the time. On the back, Grandma later wrote "the first time we had our family together for seven years and also the last." It says it all. (The reunion was a surprise. No one expected the Arizona to dock just down the coast at San Pedro.)

Forty years later, in 1981, Dad wrote a long and comprehensive history of his life and gave it to me. Ten years later, I was preparing a book of memories to give him on the 50th anniversary of Pearl Harbor, and found in that history which he had written, not a single word about Pearl Harbor. This is how repressed memory works (or doesn't work).

On the other hand, my parents next male child, born in Nov. 1945, was named Frank Peter, for Dad's brother.

I asked Dad about Dec. 7.

They had a battery operated radio but Dad recalled that on December 7 they were not listening to the radio. The first word of the bombing at Pearl Harbor was received when [a colleague teacher] returned ...late in the afternoon."

During the week following the attack it was first announced that John Grabinski, a sailor from Grafton and Frank's friend, had been killed. It was only later in the week that it was learned that John Grabinski was safe, but that Frank Bernard had been killed aboard the Arizona. (Mr. Grabinski lived into his mid-80s, much of his later years in Arizona.)

Of course, the early chaos brought no news of who had died. A high school student in Dad's class recalled years later that "I don't remember us ever talking about [Dad's brother] losing his life from the Japanese attack."

The family did not get together, and to my knowledge there was no memorial service, or funeral. My grandparents, of Grafton ND, were in Long Beach; their daughter was in Los Angeles, and my parents were in rural North Dakota. There was nothing much that could be done.

Many years later, a relative of mine found a very long article in the Grand Forks Herald of February 17, 1942, and sent it to me. It was about a North Dakota picnic in Los Angeles. Reference was made to a talk by the Polish Consul in Los Angeles, in which he remembered "strong>a young man of Polish descent at Pearl Harbor, the young man being a native of the Grafton area."

The article continued: "When he had finished reading a man and his wife arose in the audience, the man asking if he might interrupt for just a moment...the man said the report of that boy's death later was found to be in error, but that the man actually killed at Pearl Harbor was the pal of the boy mentioned in the first report.. "The boy killed," said the man, "was our son!" The couple standing were Mr. and Mrs. Henry Bernard, long time residents of Grafton. The entire audience arose and stood in silence for a moment in honor of the dead hero and the parents who made the sacrifice."

There are no winners in war. Let us not forget.

Note: This is being written on December 7, 1991, at 9:15 a.m. Pearl Harbor time, and 1:15 p.m. Apple Valley MN time. I have just witnessed the commemorative ceremonies at the USS Arizona Memorial, the ship on which Dad's brother and my uncle, Frank Peter is buried. The ship was destroyed by a bomb shortly after 8 a.m. Honolulu time on December 7, 1941.

Dad's memories of 1940-42, which precede and follow these comments, do not mention the events of Pearl Harbor and his brother's death. During June, 1991, at Rutland ND, Dad and I discussed the events of those days in December, 1941. At the time of the bombing he was teaching at Rutland, Consolidated and we were living with Miss Robbins and Mrs. Lawson and her daughter Crystal at the teacherage on the school grounds.

December 7 was a Sunday in 1941. The first news about the attack on Pearl Harbor would have reached North Dakota not long after noon.

The folks had a battery operated radio but Dad recalled that on December 7 they were not listening to the radio. The first word of the bombing at Pearl Harbor was received when Miss Robbins returned to the teacherage late in the afternoon. At this point there was no word about Frank's status.

Dad's parents, and his sister Josie, were in California - Grandma and Grandpa living at Long Beach, and Josie in Los Angeles, at the time of the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

During the week following the attack it was first announced that John Grabinski, a sailor from Grafton and Frank's friend, had been killed. It was only later in the week that it was learned that John Grabinski was safe, but that Frank Bernard had been killed aboard the Arizona.

There was no funeral for Frank; and the family did not get together. There was nothing anyone could do. There apparently was little talking about the tragedy experienced by Henry. His student at the time, Orville Nelson, seemed surprised when I wrote him in November, 1991, concerning Dad's loss at Pearl Harbor. In a letter dated December 2, 1991, Orville said "Guess we were always talking about something else, anyhow I don't remember us ever talking about [Dad's brother] losing his life from the Japanese attack."

Dick Bernard
December 7, 1991

A grieving father, Henry Bernard, speaks out at a California picnic

this item was submitted to the American Legion Magazine in 1991. The newspaper article was found by Loria (Collette) Kelly of East Grand Forks MN

At left is the original of the article in the Grand Forks Herald. It is very hard to read. The entire article is very long, and has the headline "3,500 Attend State Picnic in California". This picnic was somewhere in Los Angeles, and probably about February 12. The following reference is about half way into the article, and is the only personal reference in the article (other than speeches and names of people in attendance).

From Grand Forks Herald

February 17, 1942

"A touching incident occurred during the program. In complimenting Americans of Polish for their patriotism, [Lech T.] Niemo [counsel for the Republic of Poland in Los Angeles and a Los Angeles lawyer who grew up in Minnesota] read a press report telling of the death of a young man of Polish descent at Pearl Harbor, the young man being a native of the Grafton area. When he had finished reading a man and his wife arose in the audience, the man asking if he might interrupt for just a moment. Niemo graciously complied, and the man said the report of that boy's death later was found to be an error for that the man actually killed at Pearl Harbor was the pal of the boy mentioned in the first press report. "The boy killed," said the man, "was our son!" The couple standing were Mr. and Mrs. Henry Bernard, long time residents of Grafton. The entire audience arose and stood in silence for a moment in honor of the dead hero and the parents who made the sacrifice."

I can see Grandpa doing this, and it is emotional to even type this now.

Uncle Frank's pal was John Grabenske of Warsaw, and he indeed was initially reported killed in action at Pearl. Dad used to keep in touch with him in retirement in Arizona, but the last contact from Arizona to Dad from John's wife was that his health was failing. He probably is no longer alive.

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LATE JUN 1941 -
LONG BEACH CA
from left:
Henry + Josephine Bernard
Jessie Whitaker, Frank Beer
Richard (Doc) Henry + Esther
Bernard.

Frank Bernard (Pete) to his brother "Boy" (Henry Bernard)

Nov 7 1941

Dear Boy;

Well I guess that I had better ans the letter that I got from you the 29th of sept but You see I did not get around to it till now and the reason for it is that I have been on another ship for temp. duty and I did not have the time to write to anyone while I was there but n now that I am back to the ship I can continue where I left off so here it is.

I was glad to get your letter as I always an I suppose that you heard that I made another rate while I was on leave I made it ther first of aug and they gave it to me but that was allright for me now if I get married I will get \$35.00 more for it so you see I think that I will get hitch to that little girl up in Washington she is a honey and she will join the church to marry me what do you think of that is it all right to do that, and say a fellow asked me a question as I will aske you it, it is this he wants to know if a women who was married outside of ther church I mean that they are bouth Protestens and now they are dey divorce would it be alright if this women joined the church in order to marry this boy who is already a ~~member~~ in the church and you tell me for him? I told him that I would aske you about it I knew that you would know or find about it will you?

Well things are the same out here as ever and now it is not so hot as it was awhile back it rains ever once in a hile now and that makes it cooler to be around. Well I guess that I can't to seem to think of may more to write about but may ey next time I will have some good newa for you so stand by for it you mabe surprised at it if you know me I do things in a hurry so you may have a sister in-law to cope withe the next time you come out here to the coast so look out for my smoke well till the next time this the end. (finis)

your Bro. Pete

"Boy" is Henry Bernard Jr. When he was born in 1907, the doctor announced from the birthroom, "it's a boy", and the nickname stuck. Henry's brother Pete (Frank Peter) wrote this letter aboard the U.S.S. Arizona. It was the last letter received by Henry from his brother.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Subj: BERNARD, Frank Peter, 325 39 68, Shipfitter second class,
United States Navy, Deceased - Transcript of service of

24 Jul 1915	Born in Grafton, North Dakota.
4 Sep 1935	Enlisted in the United States Navy as Apprentice Seaman at Minneapolis, Minnesota. Home address listed as: 103 Wakeman Avenue, Grafton, North Dakota.
4 Sep 1935	Transferred to U. S. Naval Training Station, Great Lakes, Illinois. (Domestic)
8 Jan 1936	Transferred to the U. S. S. ARIZONA.
11 Jan 1936	Received aboard the U. S. S. ARIZONA. (Foreign)
16 Jan 1936	Rating changed to Seaman second class.
1 Dec 1936	Rating changed to Seaman first class.
4 Sep 1939	Enlistment extended for a period of two years.
16 Aug 1940	Rating changed to Shipfitter third class.
27 Jun 1941	Issued Honorable Discharge from the U. S. Navy.
28 Jun 1941	Re-enlisted in the U. S. Navy as Shipfitter third class.
1 Sep 1941	Rating changed to Shipfitter second class.
7 Dec 1941	Reported to have lost his life this date as Shipfitter second class, while stationed aboard the U.S.S. ARIZONA.

Medals:

World War II Victory Medal
American Defense Service Medal
Good Conduct Medal
Purple Heart

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No time lost due to unauthorized leave.

By direction of Chief of Naval Personnel.

M. E. REEDER
Head, Casualty Section

Minneapolis Star Tribune

60 years after A-bomb

Sat. Aug 6, 2005

WWII remembered in letters

By Dick Bernard

"Hurrah, the old war is over!"

With these exultant words in August 1945, Grandma Rosa Busch, writing at the farm near Berlin, N.D., began her letter to her son, and my uncle, Navy Lt. George W. Busch.

As she wrote her "Hurrah," the deck officer of the USS Woodworth, George Busch's home for the preceding three years, recorded that the ship was "underway with Task Unit 38.3.9 consisting of 4 heavy units and 6 escorts."

Later, the deck log for Sept. 11, 1945, reported that the ship had anchored a few hours earlier in Tokyo Bay. Indeed, "the old war [was] over."

The USS Woodworth docked in Portland, Ore., on Oct. 20, 1945, and Uncle George began his return to civilian life.

One Navy man who didn't return was my Uncle Frank Bernard, brother-in-law of Rosa's daughter, Esther. Frank went down with the USS Arizona Dec. 7, 1941, one of the first of hundreds of thousands of U.S. casualties in World War II and one of perhaps 50 million total casualties.

Uncle George and Aunt Jean, his wife, wrote hundreds of letters to each other from 1941 to 1945, and they saved every one.

On Aug. 6, 1945, the first atomic bomb exploded over Hiroshima, Japan. Three days later, though thousands of miles apart, the two wrote almost identical words.

Aunt Jean, from near Grand Forks, N.D.: "The news that excited everyone is Russia's declaration of war on Japan. Surely Japan will crumble now under the combined pressure, new atomic bomb and repeated attacks."

Uncle George, from somewhere in the Pacific: "Good news! Good news! Comrade Joe came through with a declaration of war against Japan. That should step up VJ day considerably. This plus the new bomb might even convince the Japs that the struggle is futile. Surely they can't be ignorant enough to believe that they can whip the world."

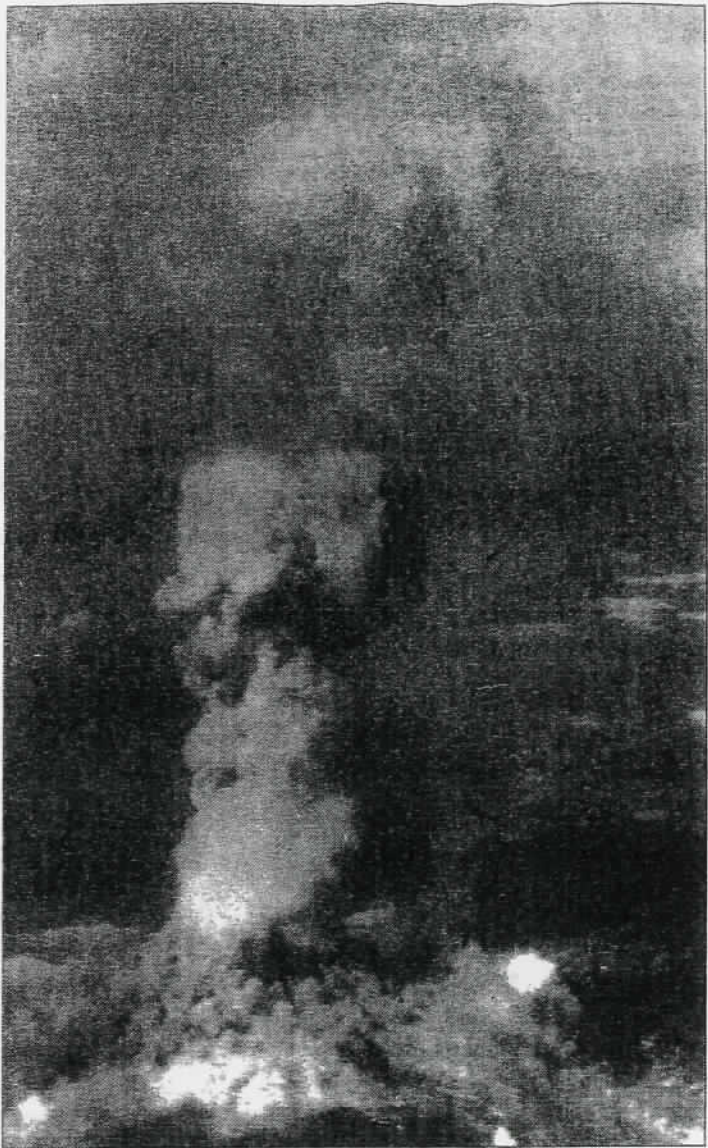
With Jean's Aug. 9 letter came an unidentified newspaper clipping, probably from the previous day's Grand Forks Herald. "1st Test Made in Desert" read the headline, and the story told of the July 1945 test of a new extremely powerful bomb "in New Mexico's desert" near Alamogordo.

The U.S. War Department, quoted in the article, said: "A revolutionary weapon designed to change war as we know it, or which may even be the instrumentality to end all wars was set off with an impact which signaled man's entrance into a new physical world."

In none of the many letters from George's family or from George himself is there evidence that anyone really knew the incredible destructive power, or even the human consequences for innocent "Japs," of the bomb they were cheering. Neither could they know how history would assess the War Department's optimistic prediction that the atom bomb would bring freedom from future war.

In all of their letters was evidence of the polarities of war: To them, the war was very personal, in the person of their brother, their son, their nephew, their neighbor; those on the other side were simply "the Japs."

In her Aug. 26 letter, right af-



An atomic bomb exploding over Japan in 1945: At the time experts predicted that the weapon would change war as we know it.

ter she wrote "Hurrah, the old war is over," Grandma Rosa, as saintly a person as I'll likely ever know, told her son then steaming toward Japan, "I went rite to my statue and lit a candle and prayed."

History doesn't record the subject of her prayer.

Neither does history record what happened at the grotto in the farmyard of the ancestral home in Germany — a grotto built by our German relatives in gratitude that four sons returned safely from the war that had all but destroyed their country.

Those four sons, I'm told, never talked about what they did in the war. They give silent

witness to Reichmarshall Hermann Goering's oft-quoted statement, as he talked with psychiatrist Gustave Gilbert in his cell at Nuremberg in 1946:

"Why, of course, the people don't want war," Goering shrugged. "Why would some poor slob on a farm want to risk his life in a war when the best that he can get out of it is to come back to his farm in one piece. It is the leaders of the country who determine the policy and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along."

When will we ever learn?

Dick Bernard lives in Woodbury.

GBN