

**Contact: Ray Read, Director**  
Montana Military Museum  
Phone 406-458-9847  
E-mail: myfun51@msn.com

P.O. Box 125  
Fort Harrison, MT 59636-0125  
Telephone 406-324-3550  
www.montanmilitarymuseum.org

**Montana Military Museum**

# Press Release

## The 82st Anniversary of the Attack on Pearl Harbor

Fort William Henry Harrison (Helena, Montana) – 6 December 5, 2023

Wednesday, December 7, 2023, marks the 82<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the attack on United States Military forces located at Pearl Harbor and throughout the then territory of Hawaii and nearly simultaneous Japanese military assaults on various military facilities throughout the Pacific.

USS Helena Cruiser Light (CL50), the second to be named such was commissioned in 1939. She was present at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The USS Helena was damaged by a Japanese Aerial Torpedo, repaired, and saw extensive combat in the Pacific in World War II in actions at Guadalcanal, Savo Island, and Cape Esperance where she sank a Japanese Cruiser and a destroyer. She was lost in Battle of Kula Gulf on July 6, 1943, along with 165 of

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her 888 officers and enlisted men. Her survivors call her “the fighting ship that went in harm’s way”.

Montana’s 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment was completing their military training at Fort Lewis, Washington was and preparing to return home after nearly 15 months of duty as a part

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of the 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. With the United State entering World War II our Montana Regiment was not to return to civilian status until January 1946.

In further reflection December 31, 2023, signals the 77<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary of the official end of World War II was on December 31, 1946.

The following are a series of vignettes concerning some of the actions of Montanans during this dramatic transformation.

#### Enclosures

1. Timeline of the Actions Concerning Pearl Harbor
2. *MEMORIES OF PEARL HARBOR & THE BEGINNING OF WORLD WAR II*

**1. Time Line of the Actions Concerning Pearl Harbor.**

**Saturday, December 6 - Washington D.C.** - U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt

makes a final appeal to the Emperor of Japan for peace. There is no reply.

Late this same day, the U.S. code-breaking service begins intercepting a

14-part Japanese message and deciphers the first 13 parts, passing them on to

the President and Secretary of State. The Americans believe a Japanese attack

is imminent, most likely somewhere in Southeast Asia.

**Sunday, December 7 - Washington D.C.** - The last part of the Japanese message,

stating that diplomatic relations with the U.S. are to be broken off, reaches

Washington in the morning and is decoded at approximately 9 a.m. About an hour

later, another Japanese message is intercepted. It instructs the Japanese

embassy to deliver the main message to the Americans at 1 p.m. The Americans

realize this time corresponds with early morning time in Pearl Harbor, which

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is several hours behind. The U.S. War Department then sends out an alert but uses a commercial telegraph because radio contact with Hawaii is temporarily broken. Delays prevent the alert from arriving at headquarters in Oahu until noontime (Hawaii time) four hours after the attack has already begun.

**Sunday, December 7** - Islands of Hawaii, near Oahu - The Japanese attack force under the command of Admiral Nagumo, consisting of six carriers with 423 planes, is about to attack. At 6 a.m., the first attack wave of 183 Japanese planes takes off from the carriers located 230 miles north of Oahu and heads for the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor.

**Pearl Harbor - At 7:02 a.m.**, two Army operators at Oahu's northern shore radar station detect the Japanese air attack approaching and contact a junior officer who disregards their reports, thinking they are American B-17 planes which are expected in from the U.S. west coast.

**Near Oahu - At 7:15 a.m.**, a second attack wave of 167 planes takes off from the Japanese carriers and heads for Pearl Harbor.

Pearl Harbor is not on a state on high alert. Senior commanders have concluded, based on available intelligence, there is no reason to believe an attack is imminent. Aircraft are therefore left parked wingtip to wingtip on airfields, anti-aircraft guns are unmanned with many ammunition boxes kept locked in accordance with peacetime regulations. There are also no torpedo

nets protecting the fleet anchorage. And since it is Sunday morning, many officers and crewmen are leisurely ashore.

**At 7:53 a.m.**, the first Japanese assault wave, with 51 'Val' dive bombers, 40 'Kate' torpedo bombers, 50 high level bombers and 43 'Zero' fighters, commences the attack with flight commander, Mitsuo Fuchida, sounding the battle cry: "Tora! Tora! Tora!" (Tiger! Tiger! Tiger!).

The Americans are taken completely by surprise. The first attack wave targets airfields and battleships. The second wave targets other ships and shipyard facilities. The air raid lasts until 9:45 a.m. Eight battleships are damaged, with five sunk. Three light cruisers, three destroyers and three smaller vessels are lost along with 188 aircraft. The Japanese lost 27 planes and five midget submarines which attempted to penetrate the inner harbor and launch torpedoes.

Escaping damage from the attack are the prime targets, the three U.S. Pacific Fleet aircraft carriers, Lexington, Enterprise and Saratoga, which were not in the port. Also escaping damage are the base fuel tanks.

The casualty list includes 2,335 servicemen and 68 civilians killed, with 1,178 wounded. Included are 1,104 men aboard the Battleship USS Arizona killed after a 1,760-pound air bomb penetrated into the forward magazine causing catastrophic explosions.

In Washington, various delays prevent the Japanese diplomats from presenting their war message to Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, until 2:30 p.m. (Washington time) just as the first reports of the air raid at Pearl Harbor are being read by Hull.

News of the "sneak attack" is broadcast to the American public via radio bulletins, with many popular Sunday afternoon entertainment programs being interrupted. The news sends a shockwave across the nation and results in a tremendous influx of young volunteers into the U.S. armed forces. The attack also unites the nation behind the President and effectively ends isolationist sentiment in the country.

## **2. MEMORIES OF PEARL HARBOR & THE BEGINNING OF WORLD WAR II**

*Helena*—assigned to the Pacific Fleet—was at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 when the Japanese attacked. *Helena* was under the command of Robert Henry English at the time. She was moored at 1010 Dock Navy Yard on the base (southeast) side of the harbor. Outboard was the minelayer *Oglala*. By chance, *Helena* was in the berth normally assigned to the battleship *Pennsylvania*, and thus became a prime target for the Japanese planes.

"Japanese planes are attacking Ford Island, All hands to General Quarters!" was the call over the ship's intercom system at about 0757 hours. A tremendous explosion partly lifted the ship bodily amidships just forward of gun mount number 3 some three minutes into the Japanese attack. Some 20 men were

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immediately killed. This attack was from one torpedo bomber which launched a torpedo and hit the *Helena* on the starboard side, just as the crew raced to battle stations. Several Japanese planes, still loaded with torpedoes, overflowed the ship to attack the battleships at Ford Island. Reports are inconsistent that some Japanese pilots aborted their attacks on *Helena* after realizing she was not the USS *Pennsylvania*.

*Helena* began to flood and a slight list of no more than five degrees was maintained by counter-flooding. Only one of the two engine rooms and one boiler room were flooded. Wiring to the main and secondary gun batteries was severed, but prompt action by damage control brought the forward diesel generator up within minutes, making power available to all gun mounts, for fire fighting and counter-flooding. With attacking planes flying overhead, the crew began to break out the service ammunition, and by 0801 hours the ship began to fight back by sending up anti-aircraft fire.

There had been a flash fire that caused considerable smoldering and heavy smoke from the explosion. Some sailors were overcome and perished due to this dense smoke. Fire control parties were initially confused because they found no active fires. Crew members responding to the General Quarters alarm closed water-tight doors, hatches and vents. This, with outstanding damage control work, kept *Helena* afloat. Crew members in the engineering sections had to resort to gas masks due to the smoke. The dead were taken dockside after the first attack was concluded. The wounded initially were taken to sickbay and by 1000 hours many were en route to the Naval Hospital.

The ship's boilers were fired and within an hour the ship was making steam for getting underway. However, leaks due to frame and shaft damage contributed to delays in preparing the ship. By 1140 hours the ship was secured from attempts to get underway when it was finally determined she could not make more than 10 knots for no more than five hours. The ship was moved to dry dock on 8 December. It was found that the ship suffered considerable stress fractures within its engineering piping and tanks. All of these would have to be replaced or repaired stateside at Mare Island Naval Shipyard in California. The ship sailed out of Pearl Harbor a few weeks later and she would not be fully repaired until the end of June 1942.

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*\*\*\*Taken from various U.S. Navy Reports produced in response of December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941 On File at the Montana Military Museum*

#### RUMORS

*\*\*\*The following exert is from a 163<sup>rd</sup> Journal started at the beginning of the Montana Regiment's call up in September 1940 through it demobilization in December 1946.*

Talk was now rife throughout, of our getting discharged shortly, when along comes President Roosevelt and Congress with a bill extending the guardsmen' tenure another 18 months. Spirits were considerably dampened by this, but all took it rather well as a 15 day furlough had been promised us by Major General White. This we all were looking forward to and the sting of our sorrows was somewhat lessened.

As per custom only half the regiment was allowed furloughs at one time. Furloughs were so arranged to have all the troops at the cantonment area on Saturday (September 2) at which time a 41<sup>st</sup> Division open house and parade was scheduled to celebrate the division's first year of active service. This day was a gala day. Guests were invited, to inspect the area, and the troops. Formal invitations were issued to everyone in Montana who had ever run for or contemplated running public office, and those who were part of the legion, in addition to parents of all troops. Goodly representations from all parts of the country were guests of the regiment and division that day.

Each company had its own reception committee and being assigned to this detail was a break. One missed the division review this way. Division and army parades were always a bore and entailed considerable waiting; it being the army axiom it is better to be eight hours early than one minute late. Hence the regiment would rise at 4 a.m., the morning of such an event, have an early breakfast, then set out for the parade grounds beyond Fort Lewis, a five or six mile hike. Arriving there about 9:30 a.m. the troops would be re-arranged several times, bayonets would be fixed, unfixed and fixed again. Then all would sit down to wait. About 2 p.m. the parade would take place. Our role would take a scant 10 minutes or so, then the march back. Because of the army's policy towards being on time the war cry of



"hurry like hell to wait" arose. It never ended while the 163<sup>rd</sup> was in active service—it never had any reason to abate. We were always early.

After furloughs army life relaxed somewhat. We still had the strictest type of inspections. Barracks were always spotless, shoes were shined until the leather could take no more polish and web equipment was worn out through constant application of the G.I. brush. Field ranges came in for an inspection by division. The first inspection proved the ranges were still dirty, although to be fair to the mess sergeants the inspectors used long thin sticks and probed parts of the stove no one would ever suspect of being a place to harbor dirt. So stoves were cleaned again and again. Perhaps 10,000 man-hours of work were expended on the stoves and the aluminum kettles; they were worn thin by polishing with emery cloth; all this during the country's first big drive for aluminum ware. The division inspectors didn't come around the second time, but if they could have found dirt on those ranges it would have to have been with a microscope.

Pictures of the various units were taken about this time for a Fort Lewis army publication. These were the only group pictures taken of the 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment

Each company recreation room was by now fully furnished with davenports, occasional chairs, ping-pong tables, rugs and draperies. Each company had spent several hundred dollars on their recreation rooms and they were really luxurious. Many companies even purchased one or wanted a machine for the convenience of the men.

Passes were extended and nearly all settled down to finding new interests in the surrounding cities. Letters were written home for more civilian clothes and the boys were invading the haberdasheries of the vicinity for civics. By now all guardsmen received the additional \$10 monthly for a year's active service. Saturdays most received early passes to attend football games in Seattle and Tacoma and the regiment had its own football team, while several played with the 41<sup>st</sup> Division team. Funds were raised to equip the 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry football squad. Great things were anticipated for the second year of active service. Things looked on the up-grade.

Rumors became actuality, these, who had enlisted for one year in the National Guards, were being discharged and several in the regiment actually were discharged. The 28 year-old-men were

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taking physical examinations prior to being discharged and some even went to the extreme of signing their discharges, although this valuable paper was retained at regimental level. All that barred them and civilian life was an X-ray, it being much harder to get out of the army than in. These X-rays were held-up due to a shortage of film and were to be given on December 9<sup>th</sup>, when it was expected the discharges would be made final.

These 28 year-old-men turned in their property to the supply sergeants, retained only one complete uniform and were generally left alone to lounge around the barracks or take passes to the city. They passed around bottles to all and a general celebration was in order.

Payday came during the week and this was to be a weekend. Everyone, who could, it seemed, took off and celebrations were in force and the regiment fairly well scattered throughout northwest Washington. This was the weekend of December 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup>.

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor found the regiment in one of its usual payday throes. Putting it bluntly many were still battling with liquor and having a good time in general. The regimental football team was playing a game.

When the announcement came, the game broke up in the final quarter and a wild ride back to camp at a mile minute clip ensued with state highway patrol sirens clearing the way.

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Radios blared the announcement "all men of the Ninth Corp report to your stations immediately." M.P.'s had a busy day putting the boys on busses and sending them back to camp. It appeared all were looking for just one last fling at life before reporting back. Drunk or sober the men of the 163<sup>rd</sup> uttered, with grim determination, "This is it."

Supply sergeants had a bad time of it. They had to re-outfit the 28 year olds, raw ammunition and distribute it to all members of the command. At this time, due to our relinquishing much of our equipment as well as men, to the 161<sup>st</sup> Infantry, which had left the 41<sup>st</sup> Division, making us a part of a training division, the regiment was woefully unprepared as far as supplies for actual war are concerned. Some men actually went into the field without arms.

**WAR**

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Before the dawn of December 8<sup>th</sup> broke the 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry was in the field. The First Battalion in the Port Angeles, Washington area and the Third Battalion stationed around Burlington, Washington. Companies of each unit drew coast patrol duty. Gun emplacements were set-up and barbwire entanglements fashioned. Then began the cold, grueling, monotonous days of patrolling. Some patrols ranged for 30 miles, with transportation to and from these stations by truck. Many a member of the 163<sup>rd</sup> can tell you how intensely cold the Pacific Northwest can be while riding in an open truck or standing lonely vigil in the early morning. Meanwhile the provisional battalion and the Second became a mobile combat team and were bivouacked in the cantonment area.

Bivouacking in the cantonment area did not mean a life of luxury. Rather it meant "camping-out" several hundred yards from the barracks in the brush. This was done to avert casualties in case of an air raid. Every precaution was being taken in those days. This was our first experience with war and the havoc and immensity of Pearl Harbor was upon us. Many dug slit trenches for the first time and even the meals were prepared in this new campsite. It seemed strange to most troops to have to sleep outside, when only a few hundred yards away were warm barracks and beds. Many did slip back into camp and sleep. All buildings in the cantonment area were by this time blacked out effectively by blankets.

Considerable shifting of the various battalions was accomplished during the period of December 7 to February 1942, when the entire regiment was called back to Fort Lewis for re-equipping and preparations for overseas duty. Most saw duty all along the Washington Peninsula country and all will remember Port Angeles, Sequim, Quilcene, Luella Guard Station, Neah Bay and other points in this area. The Third Battalion will not forget Bellingham, Anacortes, Burlington and Mount Vernon, where they were stationed. Each company has its stories, each soldier a pleasant memory and a romance or two.

*Presented From the Desk of Raymond K. Read, Museum Director, Montana Military.*

The Montana Military Museum is located at Montana National Guard Training Center, Fort William Henry Harrison. Entry is through the main gate on Williams Street. The Museum complex is located

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on Mt Majo Street to the right past the Fort Harrison Military entrance. Look for the signs, and outside museum displays.

If you have any questions please contact Raymond Read, Director of the Montana Military; Museum at 406-841-3550 or at 406-459-6839. Website [www.montanamilitarymuseum.org](http://www.montanamilitarymuseum.org)  
E-mail address at the Museum is [info@montanamilitarymuseum.org](mailto:info@montanamilitarymuseum.org)

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The U.S. Army Center of Military History recognizes the Montana Military Museum as an official Museum Activity. The Department of Military Affairs and the Montana Army and Air National Guard sponsors the Museum. The Museum's scope is Montana Military History from the Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery to the present War of Terrorism. Exhibits tell the rich history Montanans in military service in war and peace in all services. The Montana Military Museum is financially supported through the efforts of membership the Fort William Henry Harrison Museum Foundation, a Montana public corporation, recognized as a 501(c) (3) non-profit for purposes of public education. For more information write to P.O. Box 125, Fort Harrison, Montana 59636-0125 or call 406-324-3550

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Artist's rendering of new museum facility

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