

Name _____ Number _____ Date _____

Code Talker Chapter 6

Read the following first-hand account of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Highlight any unfamiliar words, and then use a dictionary and context clues to determine the meaning of them. Found at: <http://my.execpc.com/~dschaaf/phraner.html>

George Phraner's Brush with Death Aboard the U.S.S. Arizona

USS Arizona (BB-39)

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USS Arizona - (BB-39)
Battle Station: Forward 5 inch Gun

As usual, there was a warm breeze that Sunday morning. We had just finished breakfast and drifted out of the compartment to get a little air. This was our normal routine on weekends as we had no work station to report to. It was fortunate for us that we were able to sleep in until 6:30 as many of us had been out the night before. Just as we left the mess area we heard this noise. We went outside to take a look because it's usually very quiet. When we arrived we could hear and see there were airplanes. I looked across the bow of the ship and could see large plumes of smoke coming up from Ford Island. At first, we didn't realize it was a bombing. It didn't mean anything to us until a large group of planes came near the ship and we could see for the first time the rising sun emblem on the plane wings. The bombing was becoming heavier all around us and we knew this was REALLY IT!

At first there was a rush of fear, the blood started to flow real fast. It was then that general quarters sounded over the speaker and everything became automatic. My battle station was on a forward 5 inch gun and it was standard practice to keep only a limited amount of ammunition at the guns. There was only one ready gun crew on each side and mine wasn't one of them. There we were, the Japanese dropping bombs over us and we had no ammo. All the training and practicing for a year and when the real thing came we had no ammunition where we needed it. As unfortunate as this was, that simple fact was to save my life. Somehow the gun captain pointed at me and said, "you go aft and start bringing up the ammunition out of the magazines". The aft magazines were five decks below.

A few moments later I found myself deep below the water line in a part of the ship I normally would never be in. I remember getting these cases of ammo powder and shells weighing about 90 pounds each. I had begun lifting shells into the hoist when a deafening roar filled the room and the entire ship shuttered. It was the forward magazine. One and half million pounds of gun powder exploding in a massive fireball disintegrating the whole forward part of the ship. Only moments before I stood with my gun crew just a few feet from the center of the explosion. Admiral Kidd, Captain. Van Velkenburg, my whole gun crew was killed. Everyone on top. Seconds after the explosion the lights went out and it was pitch black. Almost immediately a thick acrid smoke filled the magazine locker and the metal walls began to get hot. In the dark and not being able to breath, we made our way to the door hatch, only to find it shut and locked. Somehow we were able to open the hatch and start to make our way up the ladder. I was nauseated by the smell of burning flesh, which turned out to be my own as I climbed up the hot ladder. A quick glance around revealed nothing in the darkness, but the moaning and sounds of falling bodies told me that some of my shipmates had succumbed to defeat and had died in their attempt to survive.

