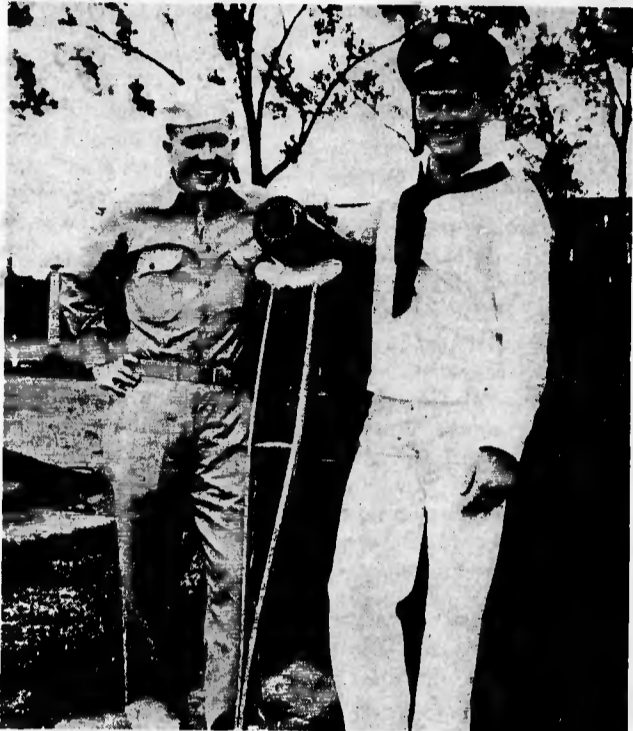
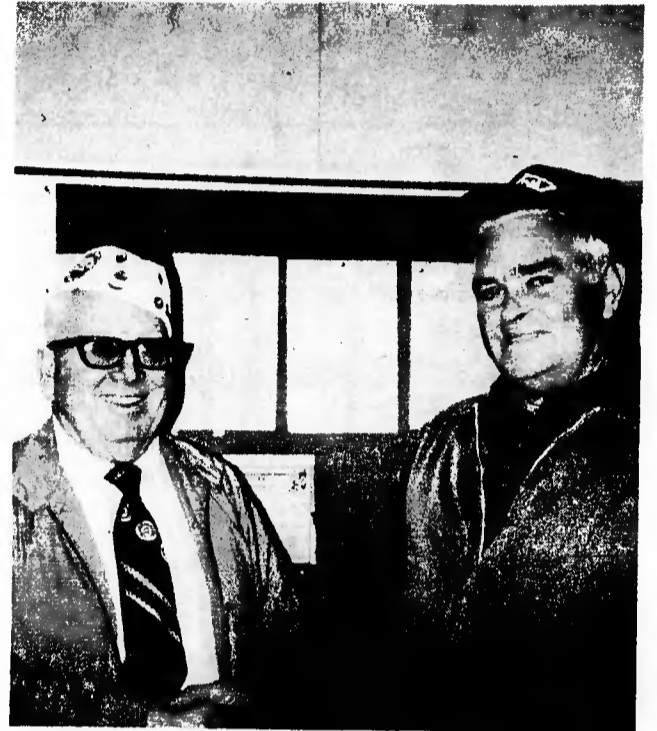


HIGHLIGHTS



Thad Lilly (left) and Earl Lewis shortly before the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941.

Two veterans remember Pearl



Thad Lilly (left) and Earl Lewis, still remember Pearl Harbor, today.

Thad Lilly woke up on Sunday morning, December 7, 1941 just like he had many Sunday mornings since he and two of his Vanceboro friends had joined the U.S. Army. Stationed at Schofield Barracks in the Hawaiian Islands, he was enjoying what has been called the "Paradise of the Pacific." A few minutes before eight o'clock, Thad walked into the Mess Hall, picked up the usual hot cakes for breakfast, and headed for a seat near some friends. Not very far south, another Vanceboro native, Earl Lewis, was sipping a coke on the deck of the *Ogalala*, a minesweeper which was tied to his own ship, the

U.S.S. *Helena*, a cruiser. The ships were moored directly across Pearl Harbor from the U.S.S. *Arizona* which like several other battleships rode anchor in the perfect formation of Battleship Row. From where Earl stood, he could see Hickam Field off to the right with its proud planes lined up on the runway shining in the morning tropical sun. Sweeping around to his left he could see the rest of the United States Pacific Fleet at anchor with colorful flags flying and polished armor reflecting a power which seemed invincible. As Earl took a second swallow from his drink, he noticed an airplane peel out

of the heavens over near Hickam Field. Suddenly, a huge explosion sent clouds of dirt high up in the air. "At first, we paid little attention to the explosion since the Air Force was always making simulated bombing runs," Lewis explained. When the next explosion sent up clouds of fire, smoke, and the twisted metal of the once neatly lined planes, Earl put down his drink and headed for his battle station on the *Helena*. He was almost halfway there when an explosion ripped the *Helena* claiming over thirty lives.

Meanwhile back at Schofield, Thad Lilly was just getting ready to eat his hot cakes when he

heard an explosion. It sounded like a boiler blowing up, not uncommon an occurrence. However, when he heard the second, then the third explosion, Thad realized something was wrong. "I ran outside into the quadrangle and saw planes flying overhead. As my eyes scanned the skies, I could see bombers diving in on Wheeler Field, an Air Force base very close by. Bombs visible falling from the planes caused tremendous explosions which sent up billows of smoke and fire. I heard someone say 'They're pulling better maneuvers this year than last year.' Then as one plane turned, I saw the insignia, The Rising Sun, on it. About this time someone yelled! 'We're being attacked by the Japanese! Japanese fighter planes began strafing us with machine gun bullets. I ran into the barracks to get my equipment. While there, I heard on the radio that Pearl Harbor and Hickam Field were under attack. By this time, my unit, the 21st Infantry Regiment was firing machine guns, M-1 rifles, and Browning Automatic Rifles at the planes," explained Lilly. Lilly added that a few days after the attack, he learned that the 21st had been credited for shooting down six planes (two Japanese and four American.)

After the first explosion, a second rocked the *Helena*, but Earl managed to get to his station below deck in the ammunition storage area for one of the forward gun turrets. Earl's job was to help pass ammunition up

to the turret for firing. During the heaviest part of the attack, Lewis was ordered to go up into the turret to help with the firing. However before Earl could grasp the ladder, a friend scurried up in his place. As the young sailor climbed out of the hatch a nearby explosion ripped him in half killing him instantly. When Earl finally did come out of the below deck compartment after the attack was over, he witnessed a terrifying sight. The once proud U.S. Pacific Fleet was in shambles. Fires raged out of control over at Hickam Field as well as on many ships in the harbor. Across the way, the U.S.S. *Arizona* was sinking. "We were really scared," Earl explained. "We didn't know if the Japs were going to come back or not. We set up machine guns on the deck and shot at anything that moved across the sky. I helped shoot down three American planes myself."

Lilly and Lewis had been in the U.S. Armed Forces scarcely a year when the Japanese attacked. Lilly recalled that he and two friends had originally decided to join the navy since jobs in Depression-ridden eastern North Carolina were hard to come by. However, one member of the trio failed to pass his entrance requirements. The group decided to stay together and went to join the army. According to Thad, the boys chose foreign service and requested Hawaii probably because of the pictures they had seen labeling it as the "Paradise of the Pacific."

"Of course, I imagine the pictures we had seen of those Hawaiian girls dancing the hula probably impressed us, a great deal," Lilly explained. Lilly remembered seeing the beautiful harbor on his way to Honolulu on Saturday afternoon, December 6. The ships lined up displaying all their colors were especially impressive to him since he had wanted to join the navy in the beginning. The next time Lilly saw Pearl Harbor, he was carrying the wives and children of the officers and enlisted men to catch their ships which would take them back to the mainland. The sight that greeted him was quite different from the one a few hours before. Both men felt very lucky to return home safely. After Pearl Harbor, Lilly saw action in some of the Pacific Islands against the Japanese and later against the Nazis in Europe. In Europe, he was severely wounded in an explosion that killed several men near him. Earl stayed on the *Helena* until it was sunk by Japanese torpedoes later in the war. Both men found their way back home to eastern North Carolina after the war. Thad Lilly now resides in Grifton, N.C. with his wife, the former Bertie Small of Newport. They have 2 children. Earl Lewis lives in Vanceboro where he serves as head of the town's Water and Sanitation Departments. He is married to the former Della Coward of Vanceboro. They have 2 children.

Rick Cannon

Sewer hook-ups begin today

Vanceboro, N.C.—Mayor Jimmie Morris announced that the long awaited hook ups to the new Vanceboro Waste Treatment System can begin today. The announcement came at the regular monthly meeting of the Vanceboro Board of Aldermen. Following the meeting, Mayor Morris took the aldermen present on a tour of the new facility located south of Vanceboro on Highway 17. Morris indicated earlier that citizens would have forty-five days in which to hook up to the system. After the forty-five day period, the situation would be reviewed by the Board. Morris indicated the follow-

ing the forty-five day period the Board would probably recommend that customers be billed for the sewer service whether hooked up or not. He added that the waste treatment system is completed except for some minor clean-up and street repairs. A formal dedication of the new facility will come in the early spring. In other action, Morris announced that Rev. Ron Chapman, pastor of the Vanceboro Christian Church, will serve as the town's magistrate. He will have an office in the Old Town Hall building and will post some office hours. Alderman Alton Whitley announced that the County

Board of Commissioners had approved up to \$1200 in matching funds to construct a rest room in the Vanceboro Public Library. Mayor Morris expressed concern that with the high priced electrical equipment in the sewer plant something must be done to discourage people from driving back to the plant. He recommended fencing in the road with a gate close to the highway using money that had not been spent. The Board approved his recommendation.

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