

Last Tipton Pearl Harbor Vet

(Story from WMC TV-5 Memphis - December 7, 2006 - Pearl Harbor Day)

Last Tipton County Pearl Harbor vet tells story

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"It was a hectic day.

Sixty-five years is a long way to look back, but Bill Jim Davis remembers Pearl Harbor as clearly as the pictures hanging on his office walls.

"That's our ship right there behind there," he said, pointing out photos.



USS Helena - the first ship to receive the Navy Unit Commendation.

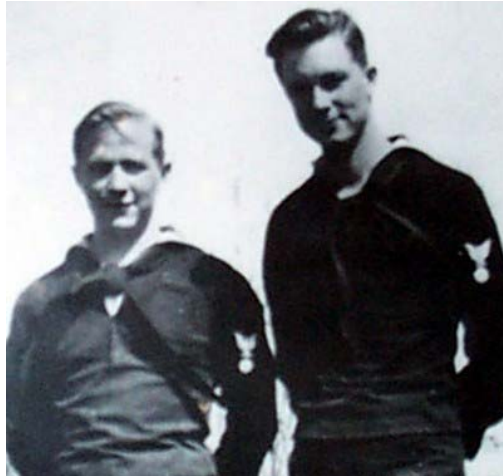
The day of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Davis was a 21-year-old first class petty officer serving on the USS Helena. He was below deck about to read the Sunday paper when the general alarm sounded.

"I hadn't walked 4 or 5 feet when there was a tremendous explosion and it knocked me to the floor," he said.

When Davis peeked through a hatch on the deck, he saw that the ship had been torpedoed by a Japanese aircraft.

"All of a sudden it dipped its wings and I saw those bright red balls and I knew the Japanese had attacked us," he recounted.

Davis' younger brother Rob Roy was also on the Helena. Both young men survived the attack unharmed. "If that torpedo had been about 50 feet back from where it hit, I would have been out of here."



Roy (L) & Bill Jim (R) Davis - 1942

But the U.S.S. Helena lost 21 men on that day in 1941. "I had some real good friends that got killed in that thing, real good buddies."

At 86 years old, Davis is the only remaining survivor in Tipton County. "They've all passed away so there's not any left," he said.

He's written a book about his Navy experience which he hopes to have published. Some of the memories are horrific, but he believes even tales of a dark day in history bear repeating.



Bill Jim and Helen Davis at Tipton County Memorial