

I Was There

**Residents of the
Clifford C. Sims State Veterans'
Nursing Home
Share Their Military Stories
with
Janet A. Nicolet**

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Dedication

There are not enough words to express the appreciation to the military men and women of the United States who have served or are serving our country. Thank you for your devoted time and efforts in keeping our country safe. We are so proud of you!

Foreword

In *I Was There*, Janet Nicolet has turned back the clock and gathered the wartime remembrances of veterans at the Clifford C. Sims State Veterans' Nursing Home near Panama City, Florida.

Veterans of three wars tell their own stories, while Nicolet intertwines their unique first-hand experiences with reports from the home front to provide a fascinating perspective of the period.

From Pearl Harbor survivors to Medal of Honor recipients, her focus on those whose selfless service and sacrifice helped shape the latter half of the 20th Century is an inspiration to all.

R. Steven Murray
Communications Director
Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs



**Clifford Chester Sims State Veterans' Nursing Home
near Panama City, Florida**

The moment you step through the door of the Clifford C. Sims State Veteran's Home you feel welcomed. That first warm greeting comes from the receptionist on duty. But it doesn't stop there. That same unique attitude permeates throughout the Home. The staff loves what they are doing; taking care of the men and women who once served our country. It is their way of saying "thank you".

During their service time, many of the residents spent grueling days and weeks fighting to keep the enemies of the United States from invading our country. Their battle scars in body and mind are still visible. Others served proudly in support roles. Not one of them liked being called *a hero*.

Some have said, "I didn't do anything special. I just sat behind a desk." Or, "I just filled boxes with supplies." Those in support roles are among the unsung heroes of the military. Day after day they lent their hands and efforts to provide those men on the front lines with everything they

needed; food, clothing, soap, fuel, auto parts, plane parts, ammunition and so on.

The mounds of paperwork produced by men and women in office positions enabled the troops to receive their pay and families to be notified of injuries or deaths. They also kept track of the status and position of personnel for information purposes for the commanders.

Others were at base camps in positions of mechanics where that kept planes in A-1 condition for safe flights by the pilots and their crew members. Trucks were inspected and repaired by men and women who knew what they were doing.

Many of the residents of Sims Veterans' Home were just fresh out of high school or basic training when they were handed orders to go into war time action; their minds and emotions now filled with fear and anxiety. But soon they would mature on the shores of Normandy, in the rice fields of Vietnam, on the snow covered hills of Korea or on a ship in German submarine invested waters.

Decades later they call to mind their experiences with pride. They remember facts, dates and their buddies by name, but choke-up when sharing details of their friends who died on the battlefield. Their stories are on the pages that follow.

They were there!

Day of Infamy

War in the Pacific

For two decades after World War I, Japan experienced earthquakes (dozens in 1920) and other natural disasters which effected the country socially and economically.

Japan's Great Depression hit that country in the mid-1920s leaving industrial workers without jobs and others who lost their life savings. To make matters worse, crops were seriously reduced because of repeated drought and cold weather. The economics of the country took another nose-dive when the United States was plunged into its Great Depression in 1929, and the large quantities of silk generally purchased from the Japanese ceased.

Japan's citizens died by the thousands from malnutrition, influenza and tuberculosis – while others survived on tree bark and roots. The entire country was at her lowest ebb.

The prospects of war in the Pacific began with Japan's intentions to take over Southeast Asia. Japan knew it had to curtail any intervention by the United States and Great Britain, thus they attacked Pearl Harbor.

The Imperial Japanese Navy Admiral, Isoroku Yamamoto, initiated the Japanese surprise air attack on Pearl Harbor with their superior zero fighter planes. They flew in from the *north* over Oahu, knowing that the main U. S. naval flotilla was stationed in Pearl Harbor on the *south* side of the island. They could only believe that the U.S. Navy would not be contemplating any kind of attack

from the north. As they approached the island, the Japanese navy hoped to catch the military off guard on this Sunday morning. Their principal mission - cripple the Pacific Fleet.

On December 7, 1941 at 07:55 (Hawaiian time) the Japanese launched the first of three waves of attack planes. A total of three hundred and sixty planes sank or severely damaged eighteen ships, including eight battleships, three light cruisers and three destroyers. One hundred sixty one U.S. Army and Navy planes were destroyed and seventy-one Army and thirty-one Navy planes seriously damaged. The Japanese had successfully accomplished their mission.

The casualties suffered by the U. S. Navy and Marine Corps came to a total of two-thousand eight-hundred ninety-six. The Army lost two hundred-twenty-eight and over five-hundred wounded. Civilian casualties numbered fifty-seven, and many more were seriously injured.

An hour and a half after the Japanese planes attacked the U.S. Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor Colonel Hideo Ohira of Japan's Imperial Headquarters read the Imperial Rescript of War to newsmen that war had been declared upon the United States and Great Britain:

End Of Excerpt