



**Newsletter Volume 3 No. 1 Winter/Spring 2021**

This issue's article is by WNHA member Doug Sjoberg and regards a well known and respected Pearl Harbor survivor, Stu Hedley. The 80th anniversary of Pearl Harbor will be next year, and Doug's article reminds us that very few veterans with Second World War service are still among us.



Stu Hedley with the author on board the USS Midway Museum. Courtesy of Doug Sjoberg

Ten to fifteen years ago I recall attending some of the meetings held every Wednesday by the San Diego Pearl Harbor Survivors Association in Chula Vista. In those days there were two dozen members or more in attendance, Mr. Hedley among them. They provided a willing source of information and inspiration to serving sailors and marines, school children, the community, and to authors and historians. I would like to personally acknowledge my gratitude to Jim Bounds who passed in 2010 for his memories of not only being one of the last men extracted from USS *Oklahoma* (BB-37) a day and a half after she capsized and sank at Pearl Harbor, but also his experiences on board USS *Helena* (CL-50) when she was torpedoed and sunk at Kula Gulf in July 1943. These memories enriched my own work just as the memories of so many veterans have advanced the understanding and appreciation of our history and the sacrifices made to ensure that democracy survives in the face of the many challenges it faces, both external and internal. Time is inexorable of course but in the meanwhile, it is a pleasure to recognize Stu Hedley and to wish him many more birthdays to come.

**Contact the WNHA**

Email [info@wnha.net](mailto:info@wnha.net) for more information about the Association. We welcome new members. Check out our web page at [wnha.net](http://wnha.net). Follow @WNHA3 on Twitter for regular updates of the Association's events. We also have a new Youtube channel where past Q&As presentations have been posted.

## WNHA 3rd Annual Symposium

Along with everyone else, the activities of the WNHA remain affected by the COVID 19 restrictions and their impact on travel and group meetings. For this reason, the Association's 3rd annual symposium will be a virtual event held over Saturday 13 March and Sunday 14 March, four hours each day. The USS *Midway* Museum will work with the WNHA on the technical issues and to ensure a smooth and informative event.

We are excited to experiment with the virtual format because it will make the event more accessible to our membership residing outside the San Diego area. We expect to finalize the program by the end of this month. Further details will be forthcoming in February via a special mailing. In the meanwhile we expect to offer presentations by:

- Keynote Speaker: James D. Hornsfischer. Mr. Hornsfischer is a noted literary agent and the author of a popular series of works about the U.S. Navy in the Pacific including *Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors*, *Neptune's Inferno*, and *The Fleet at Flood Tide*.
- John F. Burns, the Director of Education for USS *Midway*, former archivist for the State of California and Navy veteran who served on USS *Kemper County* (LST-854) in the Mekong River in 1968 will be presenting a unique collection of color photographs relating to riverine warfare in Vietnam.
- Karl Zingheim will get into the nuts and bolts of modeling, sharing some of techniques and tips of this craft. Anyone who has made a model (and who among us hasn't?) will learn something here.
- Dr. Hal Friedman, professor of modern history at Henry Ford University will speak about the U.S. Naval War College and its transition from World War II to the Cold War
- Kevin Bertram of Fort Circle Games will discuss the process of designing his award winning game, *The Shores of Tripoli* from initial idea to realized product and how he

was able to preserve historical content in an exciting, yet simple to play game.

- Jeremy Mazur WNHA Board Member, ex-Marine and member of the MCRD Museum staff will present on the museum's collection of the occasion of its 100th Anniversary.

Other speakers are pending as of the date of this newsletter. Expect to receive the complete program by mid-February. We plan on an informative and interesting event with a broad mix of content that will appeal to everyone interested in naval and maritime history.

## WNHA Q&As

The WHNA continues with its monthly program of online events called WNHA Q&As. These are roughly sixty to ninety minutes in length and consist of an expert speaking on a subject and then fielding questions from the attendees. There are now five Q&As in the can. If you've missed any, check out the WNHA's YouTube channel and watch them online.

We are looking forward to presentations by

- 13 February: Dr. Daniel Rogers: *Was Tarawa Necessary?*
- 17 April. Brian E. Walter: *The Atlantic Campaign in WWII: Common myths and under-reported facts.*
- 22 May. Gary Giumarra: *D-Day 1942. Sledgehammer Reassessed.*

These events are held on ZOOM and there has been an opportunity for all to participate in the question portion of the program.



## Navy Legend in the Making: Chief Electrician's Mate Stu Hedley

by Doug Sjoberg

Ten years ago, at a Pearl Harbor commemoration at the San Diego Veteran's Museum in Balboa Park, I nearly was knocked over by a wiry 89 year-old guy wearing a white jacket and dripping with colorful Hawaiian leis. "Glad to meet you!" he thundered as he slapped me solidly on my back. "Welcome to the Vet's Museum! My name's Stu Hedley. What do you want to know about December 7th, 1941?" Thus, began a wonderful friendship with an energetic icon of The Greatest Generation.

Chief Electrician's Mate Stuart N. Hedley, U. S. Navy (Ret.) celebrated his 99th birthday on 31 October 2020 in front of his modest home in the quiet Claremont Mesa area of San Diego. But that Saturday was anything but quiet as hundreds of shipmates, veterans, neighbors, friends, and patriots flooded the street in front of Stu's home in a massive drive-by birthday celebration!

Well-wishers dressed in Hawaiian garb, waved Old Glory, displayed "Honk, It's My Birthday!" signs, and many even wore Halloween costumes as they paid homage and respect to Stu and a fellow Navy buddy, Clayton Schenkelberg, age 104, as they sat at a table in Stu's front yard, and faced the throng of passing, cheering people. You see, both men are among the few still living survivors of the Dec. 7, 1941 attack on American military bases at Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii---the day of infamy that began World War II for the U. S.

The celebration was orchestrated by Holly Shaffner, Director of Public Relations for the Honor Flight organization in San Diego. The group's work in taking veterans to Washington D.C. to visit historic sites and memorials has become legendary. Holly decided to support honoring Stu on his 99th birthday in homage to the dedicated work he's done in his life educating people

not only on Pearl Harbor and World War II, but on the importance of children staying in school and learning their history to be better citizens. Clayton was included at Stu's behest because of their long friendship.

Stu has been heard on local and national radio interviews, featured in memorial observances at Pearl Harbor and aboard USS Midway, and served as grand marshal in many parades. His voice is gritty and firm, his articulation superb, and his memory and wit are tonic for all! He's a dedicated Christian who serves his church and community with amazing empathy. He carries a podium, flags, and other items in the trunk of his car (yes, he still drives and drives very well!) which he uses when he officiates at the funerals of fellow Pearl Harbor survivors. He's as likeable a gentleman as you'd ever want to meet. When he flashes his wide smile, his eyes twinkle, and he gives you a bear hug that could crush a boulder, you feel wonderful!



Stu Hedley giving the thumbs up to passing cars on the occasion of his 99th birthday. (Courtesy of the author)

As we know, naval historians depend on the memories of military veterans, to fill in the pieces of the history puzzle. Stu is a master at recall and details. Born on 29 October 1921 in Miami, Florida, Chief Hedley's Navy story began with his enlistment as Apprentice Seaman on 20 August 1940 in Buffalo, N.Y. After basic training, he reported aboard the Colorado-class battleship USS *West Virginia* (BB-48) for duty in Third (deck) Division from Oct. 29, 1940 through Dec. 7, 1941.

Paraphrased excerpts from an article written by Holly Shaffner for the Dec. 2019 issue of San Diego Veteran's Magazine best describe what Stu told her of his world when it changed at 0755 that Sunday morning at Pearl Harbor:

“Stu was looking forward to a picnic with a girl and her mom that day, but instead heard the ship's announcement system broadcast 'away the fire and rescue party!' As an officer shouted 'Battle stations on the double!' Stu saw a Japanese torpedo bomber fly by so close he saw the air crew laughing as their dropped torpedo headed toward his ship.”

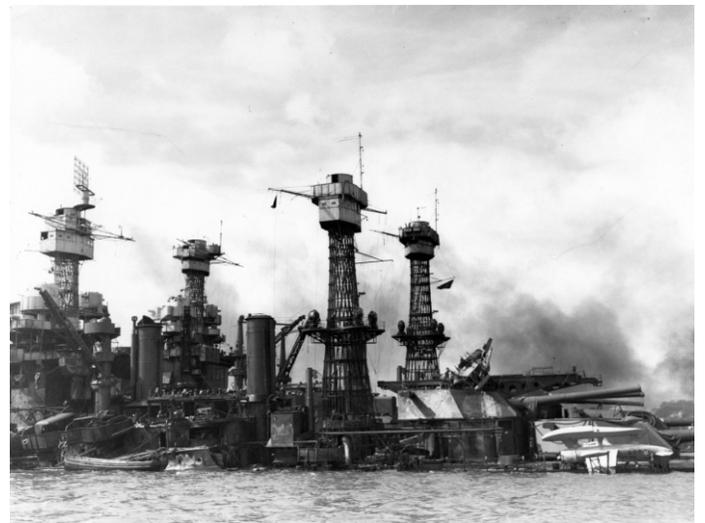
Seaman First Class Hedley ran to his position as Turret Pointer of 16-inch gun Turret III aft on the “Weevie”, as the ship was affectionately called. He sat expectantly, deeply nestled into a lower seat on the turret's right side, listening to machine gun bullets ricochet off the turret's steel protection. He felt the rumbling shudders from six to seven torpedoes slamming into the Weevie's armored port side.

Stu and the sailor serving as turret trainer situated deep on the left side wanted to see what was happening. They each opened their observation periscopes and watched in horror just as the battleship USS *Arizona* (BB-39), berthed one ship away and directly aft of the Weevie, blew up from an enemy bomb-induced main magazine detonation. 'I saw the explosions and bodies being thrown in the air,' recalled Stu. Then one of two heavy bombs that hit Weevie—15-inch shells [sic] converted to act as bombs—penetrated Turret III's roof but failed to explode. However, it shattered into many pieces of deadly flying shrapnel, which along with the concussive force of the impact, killed the 11 other crew manning the space. Only Stu and the turret trainer survived. A deeply religious man, Stu told his buddy 'If I don't die today, I will see the end of the war.'

The two sailors escaped the turret only to see their ship listing to port; oil fires raging alongside, the battleship USS *Oklahoma* (BB-37) capsized to port; and scores of sailors dying as they crawled across mooring lines to reach safety ashore, many over flaming pools of oil. Stu saw that

one of the ship's big 16-in. gun barrels was now extended close enough to battleship USS *Tennessee* (BB-43), berthed between the Weevie and Ford Island's shore, to allow he and his buddy to run across the barrel and reach the *Tennessee's* deck.

Ordered to get to shore, Stu and his buddy stripped to their skivvies and jumped feet first into the burning, oily water, splashing desperately to push away the flames. They swam underwater, coming up twice to get air. “It was the hottest breath of air I have ever taken,” said Hedley. They safely reached the beach as the Weevie sank into the muck of Pearl Harbor's bottom.



The sunken battleship *West Virginia* (BB-48) after her fires were out, possibly on 8 December 1941. USS *Tennessee* (BB-43) is inboard. U.S. Navy :80-G-19945

Both exhausted sailors were taken to the dispensary, cleaned up, given ointment, sulfa, and morphine and, being not wounded, ordered to care for the injured. But at 0925, Stu saw an enemy bomber diving at their building, yelled “Duck!”, and survived the resulting explosion which hit the center of the dispensary's courtyard. Stu and his shipmate then became part of a group that spent the day recovering bodies and rescuing sailors from wreckage. Part of that gruesome task included Stu having to identify for the ship's doctor the dismembered body of one of his best friends aboard ship.

The Weevie was done for and Stu would be needed elsewhere. On Dec. 8, he was transferred to the heavy cruiser USS *San Francisco* (CA-38), which survived the attack. During his service he manned one of her eight secondary battery's 5-inch/25 cal. guns mounted amidships along both sides. His ship fought tirelessly in supporting amphibious landings and in the fierce cruiser-destroyer slugfests with the cream of the Japanese Navy around Guadalcanal and the Solomon Islands.

In the Battle of Cape Esperance, Oct. 11-12, 1942, the *San Francisco*, along with eight other cruisers and destroyers, engaged in a fierce gun-torpedo night battle in which Stu's ship took many projectile hits that decimated the 5-inch gun crews. Stu's crew was the only one not suffering a casualty. At one point, Stu turned to shout to his new best friend who was serving on a nearby gun mount just hit by an enemy shell, only to realize he was talking to just the slumped over upper half of his friend's torso. Yet he returned to his gun to resume his duty.

Stu left the *San Francisco* in March 1943 to attend destroyer training and gyro school after which, now an Electrician's Mate 2nd Class Petty Officer, he served aboard destroyer USS *Massey* (DD-778) from March 1943 – March 1946. On *Massey*, he survived numerous kamikaze suicide plane attacks off deadly Okinawa during April 1945.

From 1946-47 Stu served at Naval Communication Station, Cheltenham, Maryland, then became a boat engineer at Deep Sea Diving School, Washington D.C. There he met Wanda Nypert, an FBI employee from Terryville, Connecticut and they married on June 18, 1949.

With the outbreak of the Korean War, Stu transferred to destroyer USS *Dashiell* (DD-659) serving from April 1951 to December 1955 and participating in the blockade of Wonsan Harbor. By this time Stu had risen in rate to First Class and he served from 1956-59 at Motion Picture Operations at Naval Training Center, San Diego. Stu made Chief Electrician and took his final assignment as the Gyro Chief aboard destroyer tender USS *Prairie* (AD-15) from 1959-60. Chief Hedley retired from active duty on 29 August 1960.

Stu's civilian life was one of service. He worked for twenty-one years for the La Mesa-Spring Valley School District after which he worked for the government from 1984-96 doing infrared inspections of Military Sealift Command ships and Navy aircraft carriers. As Stu says "My wife pulled my liberty card in 1996 and I retired fully!"

Holly Shaffner's article relates that every five years, Stu and Wanda would take a trip to celebrate their marriage. For their 25th anniversary, they visited Hawaii. As their tour boat entered the harbor, Stu had flashbacks of the enemy planes attacking, bombing, and strafing. He reported he could hear and see the planes, remembering the sounds and smells. Wanda asked him what was happening to him and for the first time he told her about being there on Dec. 7, 1941.



Stu Hedley and fellow Pearl Harbor survivor Clayton Schenkelbert (L) looking good given their combined age of 203 years.

Wanda has since passed away. In their fifty-six years together, they raised a family of five children, five grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. He lost a loving grandson, a Marine who served in Iraq, to an auto accident several years ago. But during adversity, Stu just picks up speed and puts his heart into serving others. Since 1984 he has been active in San Diego's Carnation Chapter of the national Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, rising to be its President in recent years. His unbridled enthusiasm for preserving naval history and educating our children have brought him many accolades. He was Joint Veteran of the

Year in 2001, Veteran of the Year in 2005, and has served as parade chairman, chaplain, and guest speaker for untold community events and memorials.

Stu estimates he's spoken to over 200,000 people about Pearl Harbor but laments the fact that Pearl's story is fading in the history books and peoples' minds. He vigorously tells students to "stay in school!" and "learn to love one another." He earnestly advises them to "set goals and stick with them," and to "be committed to what you are doing." He's an advocate of the meaningful and accurate telling of U. S. history and is a masterful storyteller in that regard.

Chief Hedley earned the right to wear the following personal decorations and campaign medals during his Navy career: Navy Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon, Five Good Conduct Medals, American Defense Service Medal WWII, American Campaign Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, World War II Victory Medal, Navy Occupation Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Korean Service Medal, and United Nations Korean Service Medal.

He's a meatloaf-and-potatoes guy, and loves Belgian waffles for breakfast. He's an avid fan of golf; was a good golfer in his day on those courses in Hawaii. He even is a razor on the small putting green installed in his backyard



by a friend. Don't challenge him though--he's a former "gunner" and can cunningly put ordnance on target with those putts!

Stu is a man of faith. A loving family man. A patriotic, retired Navy Chief who still cares for his old shipmates. He's a champion of naval history. Stu Hedley has "the right stuff." I don't know if they still have the mold to make men such as he. If not, we as a nation need to find it.

## Memberships dues are due

The WNHA is a non-profit membership association for the study and promulgation of naval history. We are open to all individuals with an interest in naval history through academic or professional affiliation, military service, publications, interests in ship modeling, naval war gaming, or association with family or veterans, or through personal interest. We try to run a tight ship and provide our members with services that are of value. 2021 Membership dues of \$50 (\$25 for students) are now due. Please send your check payable to WNHA and in care of Vincent O'Hara, 631 EJ Street, Chula Vista, CA 91910. Or, email us at [info@wnha.net](mailto:info@wnha.net) and request a PayPal invoice We thank you for your support!

## Member Notices

Member Michael Whitby has published "A 'New Look' at Cold War Maritime Defense: The Royal Canadian Navy's Seaward Defence Report and the Threat of the Missile-Firing Submarine, 1955." in the *Naval War College Review* Autumn 2020 Volume 73, Number 4. You can find this article online at <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/>

Member Michael McDevitt has recently published *China as a Twenty-First-Century Naval Power: Theory Practice and Implications*. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2020)

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