

Stockton Honors Memory of Fallen Heroes at 75th Anniversary of Pearl Harbor Attack

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Galloway, N.J. - Stockton University honored the memory of the 2,403 members of the armed forces who died at Pearl Harbor 75 years ago today, at a statewide tribute that included presentations by Lee Darby of Absecon, N.J., whose father survived the attack, and D-Day survivor Peter Fantacone of Mays Landing, N.J.

Darby, of the area's Sons and Daughters of Pearl Harbor chapter, brought a portrait of her father, Allan B. Darby, to the stage and wore his dog tags, "so I have him close to me."

She said her father, who was in the Army's 63rd Field Artillery stationed at Schofield Barracks on Oahu, "told stories about the war every day," and probably suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

"He was supposed to get his cast off from a broken leg that day, and was coming back from breakfast when the attack began," she said. "The Japanese strafed the hospital, which had a big Red Cross on it, and the bullets missed him by inches." Her dad convinced a doctor to take off his cast and he returned to his unit to help. Later in the war, he made an amphibious landing in New Guinea, survived hand-to-hand combat, and got malaria.

She told about how on the 55th anniversary of the attack, she accompanied her father, mother and her own daughter to Pearl Harbor, where they stood on the deck of the U.S.S. Arizona with American and Japanese survivors in a tense atmosphere.

"Then one veteran reached out and shook the hand of a Japanese veteran and the tension melted," she said. "It made a peace."

Fantacone, 91, spoke about surviving D-Day, saying, "Pearl Harbor was the beginning of the war. Normandy was the beginning of the end of the war."

After receiving general absolution on a pier in England on June 5th at a Catholic Mass held for any serviceman who wanted to attend, "I knew then it would not be a practice run," he said. **-more-**

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He told of how General Dwight Eisenhower told troops that “the eyes of the world are upon you,” and while their task would not be easy, by 1944, he said the tide had turned against the Germans. “We will accept nothing less than victory,” Fantacone quoted Eisenhower as saying.

When he got to Omaha Beach in Normandy, “The dead and wounded were floating around in the water and this we witnessed.”

“By the grace of God, I made it,” he said.

John Thomas, chairman of the event and a World War II veteran, told about how he fought in a segregated Army unit, the 97th Engineers, and later learned about the abuse endured by Jewish veterans and the internment of Japanese Americans.

“When we came back home there was another war that we had to be involved in,” he said, referring to the civil rights movement where he worked with Martin Luther King in Selma and Washington.

Thomas said he took advantage of the G.I. Bill and became “the first African-American to teach history at a high school in North Jersey.” He also worked for the late U.S. Sen. Frank Lautenberg.

“I’m so proud of the fact that this university has a positive attitude here,” he said, citing the work of the Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center and Stockton’s commitment to diversity and equity.

Other members of statewide committee also attended, including National Operation College Promise Director Wendy Lang, Fairleigh Dickinson University Veteran Outreach Director and OCP national board member Martha Papson Garcia, Lee Darby, Atlantic County Veterans Advisory Board representative Herb Davis, and the president of Stockton’s Student Veteran Organization (SVO), Paul Garrity.

The tribute featured the laying of a memorial wreath and playing of taps in Stockton’s Veterans Park, where Tom O’Donnell, assistant dean of Students/director of Veteran Affairs, noted that the Stockton event was being livestreamed to services in Pearl Harbor.

“The legacy of the men and women who defended Pearl Harbor on the day of infamy will always live on,” he said. He said their legacy of “service, sacrifice and valor are demonstrated by new American heroes” today.

Garrity, president of the SVO and a U.S. Marine combat veteran, addressed the “Greatest Generation,” many of whom who have departed, saying: “Acts of bravery and valor on your part have inspired us.”

Mid-Atlantic Battalion Commander Lt. Col. Edward Croot, a Green Beret, was the keynote speaker at the luncheon, where he addressed the service members who died at Pearl Harbor by saying: “We haven’t forgotten your sacrifices that day.” He also told them that the United States was attacked again in 2001, and that “young men and women stood up to the call on September 11.”

“The kids that I’m recruiting right now - they’re different,” he said. “They’re joining to make a difference. We’re still going to be in good hands,”

At 12:48 p.m., the group took part in a national moment of silence to observe the time of the initial surprise attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor in Oahu, Hawaii. All eight U.S. Navy battleships were damaged, with four sunk, along with cruisers, destroyers and other ships. The attack shocked the American people and led directly to the nation’s entry into World War II in both the Pacific and Europe.

Maisha Scudder, a constituent advocate, read a message from U.S. Sen. Cory Booker, D-NJ, “recognizing the men and women who answered the ultimate call.” # # #