Mr. Gorham

U.S. History II/Second World War

**Pearl Harbor: 16 Days To Die -- Trapped By The Memories -- Few Knew The Secret Of The Sunken Battleship; Families Weren't Told Of Sailors' Lingering Deaths** By Eric Gregory of *The Honolulu Advertiser*

At first, everyone thought it was a piece of loose rigging slapping against the wrecked hull of the USS West Virginia. Bang. Bang.

To the survivors on land, it was just another noise amid the carnage of Pearl Harbor a day after the Dec. 7, 1941, attack. Like the sound of fireboats squirting water on the *USS Arizona*. Or the hammers chipping into the overturned hull of the *Oklahoma*. But they realized the grim truth the next morning, in the quiet dawn. Someone was still alive, trapped deep in the forward hull of the sunken battleship. Bang. Bang.

The Marines standing guard covered their ears. There was nothing anyone could do. When salvage crews raised the West Virginia six months later, they found the bodies of three men huddled in an airtight storeroom: Ronald Endicott, 18; Clifford Olds, 20; and Louis "Buddy" Costin, 21. But the most haunting discovery was the calendar.

Sixteen days had been crossed off in red pencil. The young sailors had marked their time, not knowing what had happened to their ship or that their country was at war. For 54 years, their story has been told in hushed tones among the *West Virginia's* survivors. It has become a symbol of courage and perseverance for these aging men.

Few people knew the whole truth. The Navy never told the families how long their loved ones had survived. And for those brothers and sisters who eventually found out, the truth was so devastating they kept it a secret. Even from their own parents.

In the days after the attack, Jack Frank Miller often found himself praying on the dock near the sunken West Virginia. He had met Clifford Olds at boot camp. Both were from small prairie towns in North Dakota. They liked fishing and motorcycles, ships and open seas. Now they were serving together on the same battleship.

They had been drinking beer at a Pearl City tavern, the Monkey Bar, the night before the attack. A woman snapped their picture, with a third sailor. Olds was smiling, toasting his friends, a Camel cigarette dangling from his fingers. Miller just knew Olds was still alive down there, probably trapped in the airtight fresh-water pump room, waiting to be rescued.

But the ship had taken at least six torpedoes and two bombs, burned for 30 hours, and settled in the mud of the harbor bottom, its main deck covered in oily water. Cut a hole to get someone out and you'd flood the whole thing. Use a torch and risk an explosion. Miller knew what that meant for his friend. "His days are numbered," he thought. "I'm afraid it's going to be a lingering death."

No one wanted guard duty that put him within earshot of the West Virginia, especially on quiet nights. They would do anything to trade posts so they wouldn't have to hear the desperate - almost tireless - cry for help. "God, I can't go by that ship anymore," a buddy told Marine Dick Fiske. He used to stand watch with Cliff Olds. These were just normal guys, Fiske thought. Just like him. They used to gossip about their time in port, drink a beer now and then. Talk about girlfriends back home, worry about the threat of war.

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After months of picking bodies from the *West Virginia,* sailors removed the remains of three men from storeroom A-111, clad in their blues and jerseys. They were carried away in heavy canvas bags drawn tight at the top.

The clues left in the dry storeroom hinted at a horrifying demise. Flashlight batteries littered the floor. The manhole to a supply of fresh water had been opened. Emergency rations had been eaten.

And the calendar. A foot high, 14 inches long. A red "X" scratched through the dates from Dec. 7 through Dec. 23. Word spread quickly of its discovery. The survivors couldn't believe it, especially Fiske, as he watched the bodies brought out. "Now we know how long they were actually there," he thought.

But families weren't told. Costin’s sister, Edna Heil, first learned the truth about his death from a reporter last week. "It is so sad, it just breaks you up," she said.

Another knew the truth

Duke Olds had learned the real story about his brother Cliff from their cousin, a sailor assigned to the shipyards in Bremerton, where the West Virginia was repaired. He told his other brother and two sisters. But not their parents. It would be too much for them, especially Dad. He and Cliff were close.

Duke Olds' mother, Jane, died in 1956. His father, Nathan, died 15 years later. Duke kept his promise - they never learned the truth. "I've never even told it to my wife."

The calendar, sent to the chief of naval personnel in Washington, D.C., after it was found, now is lost.

Ronald Endicott and Buddy Costin are buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific at Punchbowl crater in Honolulu. Cliff Olds' body was returned to his hometown and buried in the city cemetery.

All their headstones say they died on Dec. 7, 1941.

QUESTIONS:

1. What are the names of the three sailors were trapped in the West Virginia?
2. Why was the Navy unable to rescue the men?
3. How did the trapped men try to alert others of their predicament?
4. What day did the three young men die?
5. Why did the Armed Forces NOT tell the parents the true nature of their deaths?