

## **OLDEST SURVIVING USS ARIZONA CREWMAN DIES AT 100**

**LT. COMMANDER JOSEPH LANGDELL (Oct 1914 - Feb 2015)**

**ONLY EIGHT CREW MEMBERS REMAIN**

**183**



*USS Arizona survivor retired Lieutenant Commander Joseph Langdell at the 65th anniversary commemorations at Pearl Harbor, 2006.*

On December 7, 1941, Joseph K. Langdell was one of the lucky ones. The officer was among the minority of USS Arizona crewmembers who survived the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. **Last week, (Feb 10, 2015) the oldest of the battleship's survivors passed away at the age of 100 at a nursing facility in Yuba City, California. With Langdell's death, only eight of Arizona's veterans still survive.**

With winter's teeth about to bite into his native New England, Joe Langdell relished another mild Hawaiian night. The 27-year-old, who had left his job as a junior accountant in Boston to enlist in the U.S. Navy the year before, had recently been commissioned as an ensign and assigned to USS Arizona based at Pearl Harbor. Assigned to temporary shore duty with a group of Navy photographers on December 6, 1941, Langdell turned in for the night, not in his normal bunk in the battleship's No. 2 turret, but inside the bachelor officers' quarters on nearby Ford Island.

Shortly after dawn the next morning, the naval officer was stirred from his sleep as the barracks began to rattle. The groggy Langdell at first thought little of the rumbling besides the odd timing of staging a practice drill on a Sunday morning, but when the clamor intensified, he rose from his bed. "When we heard a big boom," Langdell said as part of a National Park Service oral history project, "we thought we better get up and see."

When Langdell and his comrades looked out the window, they saw a swarm of Japanese fighter planes diving out of the Hawaiian skies and strafing the fleet sitting in Pearl Harbor with bombs and machine gun fire. America was under attack.



*Wreckage of the USS Arizona, December 10, 1941*

*The sailors threw on their clothes and rushed to the water's edge about 100 yards away from the smoldering Arizona, which was afire from bow to stern. As Langdell watched helplessly, a bomb struck near his quarters in the No. 2 turret. Seconds later, a massive explosion unleashed a fireball as bright as the blood-red suns emblazoned on the streaking Japanese dive bombers. Had Langdell been aboard, he almost certainly would have been killed.*

*As the mighty vessel began to sink into the harbor, Langdell began to help the oil-covered survivors wade ashore. Some had lost their vision. Some had skin peeling of their backs and arms. All were in shock. Langdell helped to pull his stunned comrades out of the water and shuttled them to the nearby naval hospital.*

***While Langdell along with 334 crewmembers assigned to Arizona survived, the surprise attack took the lives of 1,177 sailors and marines, most of whom were entombed with the battleship. It marked the greatest loss of life for any ship in the history of the U.S. Navy.***



*Joseph Langdell at the 65th anniversary commemorations, December 2006*

*More than a week after the bombing, an officer entered a mess hall where Langdell was eating breakfast. "Is there an officer here from the Arizona?" he asked. The ensign raised his hand and was told to report to a motor whaleboat that would take him and a dozen others to the battleship's charred hulk, whose decks had only just cooled down enough to be safely walked on again. There Langdell had the grisly task of recovering the remains of fallen comrades still above the waterline. He spent two days on board Arizona wrapping his dead shipmates in sheets and sweeping up their ashes in pillowcases for burial.*

*Langdell served in the Navy throughout World War II before retiring as a lieutenant commander. His commitment to his fellow crewmembers, however, never ended.*

*After returning to Pearl Harbor in 1976 to visit his son, who was also serving as a ship's ensign, he and 21 other survivors formed the USS Arizona Reunion Association to perpetuate the memory of those who had died on December 7, 1941. Beginning with the attack's 40th anniversary in 1981, the association staged private memorial services for survivors and relatives of victims every five years at Pearl Harbor and nearby Punchbowl Cemetery.*



*USS Arizona Memorial*

Langdell was a regular participant at the Veterans' Day parade in his adopted home of Marysville, California. Even after turning 100 last year, the veteran donned his Navy uniform and participated in the procession from his wheelchair. **Plans call for Langdell to be laid to rest in Arizona's sunken wreckage with his fellow sailors.**

Below Pearl Harbor's shimmering surface, his remains will be placed inside Arizona's No. 4 barbette, an honor extended to any crewmember who had been assigned to the battleship on a date that continues to live in infamy.

### **A SYMBOL OF PEACE BETWEEN AMERICA & JAPAN**

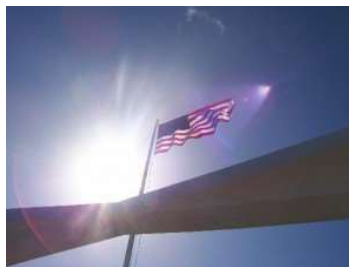
Mr. Langdell is one of three principal figures in the television documentary, "USS Arizona: Life and Death of a Lady" which aired of the A&E cable network in 1991 and 1992. **During an historic moment aboard the USS Arizona Memorial, former Arizona Officer Joseph Langdell accepts a floral wreath in memory of Arizona's entombed from former Japanese Lt. Commander Zenji Abe, a pilot who dropped a bomb on the ship.**

**Please take the time to view this Historic video at the below link. Please copy and paste this link into your BROWSER to view**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TERzb2-yf8c>



Langdell - seen here standing in the Shrine Room of the USS Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor in 2008 - did not talk about his experiences in the attack until his children had grown up.



Flag flying at the Arizona Memorial @ Pearl Harbor

*Rest easy, sleep well my brothers.  
Know the line has held, your job is done.  
Rest easy, sleep well.  
Others have taken up where you fell.  
The line has held.  
Peace, peace, and farewell.*