

## Pearl Harbor 70th anniversary



LAUREN CARROLL/JOURNAL

Jack Leach was an army medic at Schofield Barracks when Japanese planes attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941.

# Day of Infamy

Mount Airy veteran remembers attack by the Japanese

BY JOHN HINTON  
Winston-Salem Journal

**M**OUNT AIRY — Jack Leach was eating breakfast in the mess hall of the Schofield Barracks shortly before 8 a.m. on Dec. 7, 1941,

when he and his comrades heard many planes flying overhead.

"We figured they were Army pilots on maneuvers," Leach said. "When we heard the first explosion, one of the men in the mess hall said, 'That flyboy didn't make it.'"

But Leach, a 22-year-old Army medic at the time, and the others heard other bombs explode.

They then ran out of the mess hall and saw Japanese planes strafing their

barracks.

"We saw the red dots on the planes," signifying a Japanese aircraft, said Leach, 92, a Mount Airy native.

"A first sergeant then yelled, 'Everyone get back into the building,' so I ran back into the building, which was concrete. It was too hot for me outside."

Leach said he saw one or two

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Leach

**Reunited in death**

Ashes of five who survived the attack to be placed in sea. **Page A14**



## Pearl Harbor

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soldiers wounded by the planes' machine-gun fire. Five or six Japanese planes circled over the barracks to prevent soldiers from setting up machine guns and anti-aircraft batteries to return fire at the planes, he said.

But many soldiers ran for machine guns, mounted them on railings, benches or any support available and fired at the attacking planes, according to historical accounts of that day.

Japanese carrier planes had started the attack on the U.S. Navy's Pacific fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor. Fighter planes and dive bombers also attacked Army planes based at Hickam and Wheeler fields.

Japanese planes sank four American warships that morning, including the USS Arizona battleship, and damaged 14 others.



JACK LEACH

**Jack Leach dressed in a hula outfit for a USO show in 1941, before the attack. He is a member of the state chapter of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association.**

Nearly 2,500 U.S. service personnel and civilians were killed in the surprise attack that became known as the Day of Infamy and led to the U.S. entry into World War II.

Twenty-nine Japanese planes were shot down during the raid that lasted about 2½ hours.

Special events will be held today in Honolulu and Washington to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the attack.

Marc Yamada, an assistant professor of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Wake Forest University, said there might be residual anger among some Americans toward Japan because of Pearl Harbor, but many veterans have forgiven their attackers and moved on with their lives.

Leach, who still lives in Mount Airy, talked about his memories of the attack and its aftermath. A 1940 graduate of Mount Airy High School, he joined the Army that same year.

Leach was a specialist third grade assigned to the 52nd Field Artillery Battalion of the 24th Infantry Division. He was attached to the Army Medical Corps.

The 1953 movie, "From Here to Eternity," portrays the Japanese attack on the barracks, Leach said.

Immediately after the attack, Leach helped transport dead soldiers and airmen at Hickam

Field and take them to a temporary morgue in a hangar — a scene he said he hasn't forgotten.

"That comes back to me pretty often," Leach said. "Otherwise, I got it pretty well under control."

In the wake of the attack, his unit was deployed at Eucalyptus Beach on northern Oahu to defend against a Japanese invasion of the Hawaiian Islands, Leach said. His unit helped build coastal defenses in 1942.

His division was then sent to Australia in 1943 to defend that country, Leach said. Most Australian troops were fighting German forces in North Africa at the time.

Leach said that the division moved to Good-enough Island in January 1944, and it captured a Japanese airfield in the Netherlands New Guinea, which is now Jayapura, in the Papua province of Indonesia.

During his service, Leach suffered from malaria and dengue fever. He was transferred to Thayer General Hospital in Nashville, Tenn., after his division had invaded the Philippine Islands in October 1944.

He was discharged in 1945 as a sergeant first class, Leach said.

He and his wife, Virginia, have two children, five grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren.

Leach retired in 1985

after working 33½ years as the superintendent for the city of Mount Airy's water purification system.

During his retirement, he served a volunteer for local charities such as Meals on Wheels and Boys Scouts of America.

Out of 60,000 military personnel on Oahu during the Dec. 7, 1941, attack, only an estimated 3,000 survivors still participate in Pearl Harbor groups scattered across the country, USA Today reported in December 2010.

Leach is a member of the state chapter of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association.

About 300,000 men and women from North Carolina served in the armed services between 1940 and 1948, according to the N.C. State Archives.

Gov. Bev Perdue has ordered all U.S. and North Carolina flags at state buildings be lowered to half staff today from sunrise to sunset in observance of National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day.

Leach said he has visited schools and civic groups to talk about the Pearl Harbor attack because very few Americans remember what happened on that day.

"Tears still come to my eyes sometimes," Leach said.



**SURRY COUNTY GENEALOGICAL ASSOCIATION**  
**P. O. BOX 997**  
**DOBSON, NORTH CAROLINA 27017**

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October 15, 2002

Mr. J. D. Leitch  
1591 23<sup>rd</sup> St.  
Beaumont, TX 77706

Dear Mr. Leach:

Enclosed is the birth record you requested. Also, I'm sending the death certificates you needed. I hope this will give you the information you needed for your research.

I noted on the birth/death certificates of Nelda/Nellie Sue Leitch that the mother's name differs from the one you mentioned in your letter. The child was buried at Antioch Church Cemetery, located about 5 miles from Mount Airy on Hwy 89 West.

The death certificate doesn't provide the cemetery lot number. You may wish to write the church secretary, Pat Martin, and see if they can provide further information. Their address is Antioch Church, 137 Antioch Ave., Mount Airy, NC 27030. They have a cemetery committee so they should be able to help.

The copies provided are \$1.25 (25¢ each). If we can be of further assistance, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Ann B. Stewart  
Research Committee

Information that may be helpful to you  
I am quite sure that my family is the only one in Mt. Airy who spell their  
surname LEITCH.

1591 North 23<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Beaumont, TX 77706  
October 4, 2002

**Genealogical Data for John Douglas Leitch**  
1591 North 23<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Beaumont, TX 77706

**My name: John Douglas Leitch**

**Parents: John (NMN) Leitch and Mary Bette Davis Leitch Mt. Airy**

**Siblings: John Leitch (died about 1903 - at age of about 3)**

**William Campbell Leitch (died Elberton, GA about 1994)**

**Joseph Edmund Leitch (died 1972 in PA)**

**Margaret Leitch (Mrs. John Dalmer Lewis --- died 1988 in Mt. Airy)**

**John Douglas Leitch (me - born Mt Airy)**

**The minimum information I need:**

(1) My brother (Joseph Edmund Leitch) and his wife, Nellie Massey, had a child -a girl- who was born and died as a child probably in the late 1920s. I need the birth and death data on this child. Her name, I believe was Mary Nell Leitch, but I need this verified. Date, place, time of birth. Date, place, and cause of death. Where buried - cemetery, lot #, etc. Birth certificate, if available.

✓ (2) Cause of death of John Leitch. Died Nov. 1, 1928, Martin Memorial Hospital, Mt. Airy. Copy of death certificate.

✓ (3) Cause of death of Mary Bette Davis Leitch. Died Presbyterian Hospital (?) Winston Salem, NC, 1972. Copy of death certificate.

✓ (4) Margaret (Leitch) Lewis. Died Surry County Hospital, Mt. Airy, 1988 Copy of death certificate.

**Information that may be helpful to you**

**I am quite sure that my family is the only one in Mt. Airy who spell their surname LEITCH.**

J. D. Leitch



SURRY COUNTY GENEALOGICAL ASSOCIATION  
P. O. BOX 997  
DOBSON, NORTH CAROLINA 27017

1591 North 23<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Beaumont, TX 77706  
October 4, 2002

October 12, 2002  
Surry County Genealogical Society  
Box 997  
Dobson, NC 27017

About six months ago I wrote to you about the possibility of having some of your members look up one or two things for me at their convenience whenever they happen to be in the courthouse looking at other records. At the time, you said many people were on vacation, but you thought it could be done as soon as things settled down a bit from summer activities. As I explained in my previous letter, the data I assembled at the courthouse somehow never got home with me, and I am at a complete loss to know just what happened to it. You'll never know how upset I am at myself for misplacing this data.

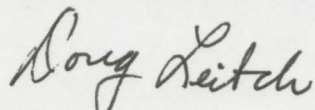
On the attached sheet I have given some basic data which will simplify the job of looking for the genealogical information I need. The information I am looking for is in the Birth-Marriage-Death records at the court house. Like all genealogists, you never quite have enough data, so I would like what every you uncover. I am in no great hurry, so do not inconvenience anyone to rush to get this immediately. Whenever you get it, I'll plug it into Family Tree Maker which I use.

I would, at the least, want to reimburse you for copying, postage, and whatever other costs you have. I trust you will let me know about this.

I want to thank in advance whoever in your organization gets this information for me, and I promise to be careful; and not lose or misplace this.

On the remote chance anyone there wants information that I can get from this corner of Texas I would certainly be happy to try to get it for you.

Thanks for your help.



J. D. Leitch



# This Day 60 Years Full of Terror For Le

By **CAROLINE BEAMER**  
Staff Writer

The explosions were deafening. Smoke clouded vision and the screams of the wounded and dying were muffled by the throb of airplanes above. This description could fit what happened Sept. 11, but what it actually describes is the Dec. 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor.

Jack Leach of Mount Airy was stationed near Pearl Harbor that fateful day. He was an Army medic and recalling the terrible event where fallen comrades were all around him still brings tears to his eyes.

Leach, 22 at the time, was posted at an army base several miles from the harbor.

"We were next to Wheeler Air Base. The island had various military installations all over it — about 80,000 military personnel in all," he said.

As a medic, Leach was assigned to different divisions, spending time with the 35th Infantry, the 27th, 21st and 19th and then an artillery unit.

"When I found out the artillery rode instead of walking, I signed up with them," he said with a laugh.

Different assignments meant seeing different parts of Oahu, particularly the plantations growing pineapple and cane. It wasn't too bad, he said. He learned to live as well as he could, getting up early on the days he knew rations were well stocked in the mess hall. Dec. 7, a Sunday, was

one of those days.

"We were having pancakes and fried eggs. They actually had eggs. And they fixed the pancakes, about this big around," he indicated, shaping his hands into the size of a saucer.

He and some of his men were still having breakfast when they heard an explosion. "The first bomb fell at 7:55 a.m.," he said. "A fellow said, 'Well, that fly boy didn't make it. He's hit something.' We stood up and looked out the window. Smoke was billowing up on Wheeler field. We didn't understand what had happened until we saw the planes attacking us."

Leach said that the Japanese fighter planes were called Zeroes. They swarmed the island "like gnats. They were flying so low you could see the pilots' faces."

The fighter planes were strafing the buildings with machine gun fire. "Because of the weather there in Hawaii all of the windows and porticoes were open. The buildings were made out of concrete, but everything was open."

A hospital was nearby. "One of my sergeants had been in a motorcycle accident and broke his leg. When they strafed the hospital a bullet went through the window and struck his broken leg. He got a purple heart and a bronze star for that. They sent him home and that was the end of the war for him."



**REMEMBERING PEARL HARBOR:** Jack Leach, wearing his Pearl Harbor military service hat and commemorative medal, holds the letter former President George Bush sent to him.

Caroline Beamer/The Mount Airy News



# Ago Was Leach

Leach said others weren't so lucky. A soldier friend of Leach's was killed while still asleep in the barracks. Everyone was caught off guard.

"Sunday was inspection day, so the ships all had their ballasts and doors open. When the bombs hit they flooded with water," Leach said he learned that it was the Japanese war strategy to sink an aircraft carrier in the harbor to block it and prevent the other carriers and ships from getting out. But that part of their plan didn't work.

Instead of the carriers being in the harbor like sitting ducks, "our three carriers were out on maneuvers," he said. A Japanese submarine that crept into the harbor to sink one of the ships was spotted.

"Somebody saw his periscope. So they released a depth charge. They got some others (submarines) further out."

Meanwhile, back at the Army base, Leach said the men were scrambling as the Japanese warplanes continued the assault.

"Our guns had been gathered together, so that somebody could guard them." The men not having their weapons was the result of Army personnel believing that the real threat was going to come from an insurrection by the Japanese living on the island.

"The rumors were flying, saying

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things like they'd poisoned our water."

But the Japanese locals were not to be feared after all, he said. "They were ashamed of what happened, because the Japanese didn't show face. The Japanese Shinto is that you make your opponent aware and then the fight begins."

However Leach did say that the Japanese embassy sat on the highest hill on the island, a perch that allowed spies to see the comings and goings of the harbor. Reporting to Japan about the number of ships in the fleet and the schedules they were keeping made Pearl Harbor ripe for the attack.

Of course the history books tell about the battleship Arizona sinking along with all of its crew there in the harbor. But for Leach, the trauma of the attack was what he had to deal with hours later, retrieving the bodies of fellow servicemen.

"I was assistant to our ambulance driver. He went out first when they picked up the wounded. He came back all tore to pieces."

Leach was assigned to collect the dead.

"We were sent out to collect bodies and body parts. I found an arm with a Gruen watch on it. That boy's mother had sent it

to him," he said.

They set up a morgue and like the rescuers at the World Trade Center, they looked for any clue they could to identify the dead, even if all that was found was a body part.

"Some couldn't be found. They were just blown to pieces. They were Missing in Action." After going through the process of determining who was on duty that day and accounting for as many as possible, those still missing were declared Lost in Action. In the end it was determined that more than 2,000 died.

When asked to make a comparison to what happened 60 years ago and what happened Sept. 11, Leach said, "The Japanese attacked military installations, not civilians. The terrorists wanted to destroy all they could no matter who they killed.

"The day after Pearl Harbor America declared war," he said. Now President Bush says we're at war with terrorists. "The nation has pulled together. We got complacent. Now there's more patriotism."

Recently former President George Bush sent Leach a letter commending him for his bravery at Pearl Harbor. Leach said he had a lot of respect for Bush because he also served in a World War.

Send Flowers

*Mr. Y. Dec. 2001*

*M.A. News*