



Jim Doyle, Governor
John A. Scocos, Secretary

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Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs hosts Pearl Harbor Day Ceremony

(MADISON) -- December 7th marks the 62nd anniversary of the unexpected attack in 1941 by Japanese forces at Pearl Harbor. President Franklin Roosevelt called December 7, 1941 as "a date which will live in infamy."

Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle signed a proclamation declaring December 7, 2003 as Pearl Harbor Day in Wisconsin. "I encourage all Wisconsinites to honor the many brave Americans who fought valiantly during World War II for their dedicated service and courage in protecting and defending the citizens and the freedoms of the United States," Governor Doyle said.

"The men and women who won the war have made a contribution to the country and the world that hopefully will ensure such a major event never occurs again," said Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary John A. Scocos.

The department today hosted a Pearl Harbor Day commemoration event to honor World War II veterans and especially Pearl Harbor veterans. Scocos presented the [Governor's Proclamation](#) with eight Pearl Harbor veterans at his side. The veterans, who had been at or near Pearl Harbor on that fateful day, were: Kenneth Sweet (Milwaukee), Robert Feller (Merrimac), Charles May (Madison), Arthur Rortvedt (Madison), William Scheer (Waunakee), Mello Stapleton (Madison), Ed Miklavcic (Brookfield), and Floyd TeWinkle (Sun Prairie). Two other veterans, Stanley Gruber (Menomonee Falls) and George Hutton, Jr. (Madison) were not present at the ceremony.

In addition to the Secretary and the Pearl Harbor veterans, the program was attended by Senator Fred Risser (Madison) who himself is a World War II veteran, six members of the Board of Veterans Affairs, and by a large contingent of veterans from the Wisconsin veterans service community and the public.

Early on that Sunday morning, America was unprepared for war. It took nearly two years to sufficiently build up U.S. forces to strike back. World War II was a pivotal event of the century.

Scocos recounted the Pearl Harbor veterans' experiences of when they heard explosions, some thought there were practice drills taking place – until they saw the red ball insignia of the Rising Sun on the wings of the

airplanes. "This state has a continuing legacy, of those who have served in the past to those serving today, at home and abroad," said Scocos.

Robert Feller, who was a messenger in the radio communications center of the USS Oglala, said his ship sank from the concussion of a torpedo blow that destroyed the USS Helena docked right next to the Oglala. Kenneth Sweet, who was on guard duty at Wheeler Field Fighter Base, went on to serve with the 78th Fighter Squadron, on Midway, and fought in the battles of Guam, Saipan, and Iwo Jima. He was one of the Founding Fathers of the 128th Air Refueling Wing, served in Korea, and retired in 1982 as a Colonel with the Wisconsin Air Guard.

"These stories and others should make us all proud," Scocos said. "We revere and salute our veterans of Pearl Harbor and World War II, whose sacrifices saved democracy during one of the darkest hours this nation has seen. We honor them for their bravery in the face of extraordinary odds."

Scocos said, "I believe it is important that we encourage veterans to share their experiences with our youth, so that new generations can learn about these important moments in history."

On Sunday, the Wisconsin Veterans Home at King will host a ceremony at 7:30 a.m. At the War Memorial Center in Milwaukee, the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, Inc. will sponsor a wreath laying ceremony at 7:30 a.m., and the AMVETS will hold a casting of wreaths at 7:00 p.m. In addition the Richard I. Bong World War II Heritage Center in Superior will host a commemorative event at 2:00 p.m.

For further information about Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) or the WDVA's Wisconsin Veterans Museum events, go to <http://dva.state.wi.us> or call 1-800-947-8387 (WIS-VETS).

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Photos from the December 5 Pearl Harbor Day event.



Pearl Harbor Survivors, WDVA Board Members, Senator Risser, and Secretary Scocos.



Pictured are Pearl Harbor Veterans Ed Miklavcic, Kenneth Sweet, Mello Stapleton, and Charles May.