



Jim Doyle, Governor
John A. Scocos, Secretary

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Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs hosts Pearl Harbor Day Ceremony

(MADISON) -- December 7th marked the 63rd 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."

The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs hosted a Pearl Harbor Day commemoration event to honor World War II veterans and especially Pearl Harbor veterans.

Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle signed a proclamation declaring December 7, 2004 as Pearl Harbor Day in Wisconsin. "Throughout 2004, we have remembered and honored the many brave Americans who fought valiantly during World War II," Governor Doyle said in the proclamation. "It is fitting that we close this special commemorative year with the unveiling by the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs of a bronze plaque in memory of all World War II veterans. This memorial will serve as a fine reminder of all those who served during the World War II."

Department Secretary John A. Scocos, who spoke about the *Day of Infamy*, said, "The generation of men and women who fought at Pearl Harbor on the infamous day of December 7, 1941 and who survived the Second World War epitomize the characteristics we all – as Americans – hold in such high esteem. This greatest generation of soldiers did not think they were committing acts of heroism ... they only believed they were doing what was right by serving our nation." Scocos talked about his father, John G. Scocos, an Ex-Prisoner Of War during World War II shot down over Germany, who passed away on December 3rd.

Scocos told the audience of about 100 people that the slogan during World War II was *Remember Pearl Harbor*, and said, "We can only believe that the actions displayed by these members of the greatest generation laid the foundation for the heroism and leadership we saw in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. There is no doubt that Pearl Harbor will forever have a lasting impact on our lives. The events that followed December 7 have long inspired us, and they will be a shining example for this nation for years to come."

Scocos presented the Governor's Proclamation with six Pearl Harbor veterans at his side. The veterans, who had been at or near Pearl Harbor on that fateful day, were: Mello Stapleton (Madison), Floyd TeWinkle (Sun Prairie), Amos Peterson (Blanchardville), John Primus (Beaver Dam), Everett Bewick (Oregon), and Firman Balza (Green Bay).

In addition to the Secretary and the Pearl Harbor veterans, the program was attended by several state legislators, including Representative Gabe Loeffelholz (Platteville), who this week was announced as Chair of the newly formed Assembly Committee on Veterans Affairs. Also attending were Wisconsin State Treasurer Jack Voight, Marv Freedman of the Wisconsin Board of Veterans Affairs, Dane County Veterans Service Officer Michael Jackson, and by a large contingent of veterans from the Wisconsin veterans service community and the public.

Mello (Mel) Stapleton enlisted with the Army Air Corps in May of 1939 and was at Hickam Field where he did radio repair and installation. He said was on his way to breakfast at the PX when he heard the explosions, stuck his head out the window, and saw "the red ball insignia" on the Japanese planes. Floyd TeWinkle entered the military in June of 1941 and served in the U.S. Army with the 295th Anti-Aircraft Artillery, Battery B and Searchlight Battalion. He was near Hickam Field when the attack occurred. He served through WWII until returning the U.S. in 1945. Firman Balza joined the United States Navy in January of 1941 at the age of 17, was first sent to Great Lakes Naval Base for seaman's training, and then was sent to the Pacific Fleet. He was assigned to the USS Maryland, in Pearl Harbor and became a gunner's mate. When the attack occurred, he said he was changing his shoes to go to Sunday Mass on the ship moored next to the Maryland, "otherwise I would have been on the USS Arizona when it happened." His ship was next to the demolished USS Oklahoma. "I'm lucky I went back to change my shoes."

Secretary Scocos said of these experiences, "The men and women of the greatest generation have made a contribution to the country and the world not seen before or since. We at the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs are here to assist World War II veterans, and through our *'Mission: Welcome Home'* program, we look forward to receiving the newest generation of combat veterans engaged in advancing freedom for the peoples of Iraq and Afghanistan."

The program finale was the unveiling of a bronze memorial plaque, in memory of all World War II veterans. Secretary Scocos explained that various veterans groups and individuals had contributed toward this plaque and a second one honoring all American veterans. He read the inscription and said the department hopes to have the plaque permanently placed in the state Capitol, in honor of veterans of WWII.

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