

Pearl Harbor survivor shares his stories

By Ryan Parker, Denver Post

COLORADO SPRINGS – No one asked Navy Lt. James Downing to hurriedly memorize the names on the dog tags of the dead and injured during the attack on Pearl Harbor.

But Downing, then 28, did it because he could not bear the thought of families not knowing the fate of their loved ones. He wrote to as many families as he could.



A memorial in Honolulu commemorates those who died Dec. 7, 1941. Photo/LTN file

The Colorado Springs resident, who celebrated his 100th birthday in August, is the oldest known survivor of the Dec. 7, 1941, Japanese sneak attack that killed more than 2,400 Americans .

Downing fought to save lives that day, all the while wondering whether it was the day his own life would end.

Downing was a gunner's mate 1st class and postmaster, assigned to the USS West Virginia. The battleship had just returned to base after more than a week on patrol.

His wife of five months, Morena, was cooking Sunday morning breakfast for a few servicemen in the couple's home near the harbor when they heard explosions in the distance, Downing said.

"Then an anti-aircraft shell landed right outside and blew a crater about 25 feet across," Downing said, illustrating with outstretched arms.

Read the whole story