



Pearl Harbor Classified: The Unknown Disaster (A BOOK by ME)

A Book by Me, Kyleigh Retzlaff

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Dean Urick was born on April 3, 1922, in rural Henry County, Illinois. His father farmed and mother was a housewife. Their family raised crops and livestock, including a purebred Angus herd, feeder cattle, hogs, chickens, and a flock of sheep. Dean attended a one-room schoolhouse and sometimes rode a Shetland pony to school. The Great Depression hit in October 1929 when Dean was just a young boy. Dean graduated from Geneseo High School in 1939 and enrolled in the College of Agriculture at the University of Illinois. In the frat house living room with all his fraternity brothers Dean listened to those famous words uttered by Franklin Delano Roosevelt announcing the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. "Little did we know how great an impact this would have on our lives," he would later write. Of that group of stunned young men, two would lose their lives and several would suffer injuries in the coming war. Dean began active duty on July 1, 1943 and arrived at Pearl Harbor aboard a converted aircraft carrier from San Francisco. He reported to the Administrative Command for the Amphibious Pacific forces (ADCOMPHIBSPAC) for assignment and was assigned to LST 353 (Landing Ship Tank) at Pearl Harbor, on May 7, 1944. One of Dean's jobs as the assistant to the First Lieutenant was to help load and unload the amphibious trac vehicles (LVTs) from the tank deck. The navy was preparing to invade the island of Saipan in the Japanese-held Mariana Islands. While on maneuvers around the islands, four of the boats (LCTs aboard LSTs) that were later meant to bombard the shore, accidentally launched too soon into the ocean, except the one on Dean's ship. The navy decided to abandon the plan for Dean's ship, so LST 353 went back to Pearl Harbor and berthed among other craft in the West Loch area. This would prove to be an important change that would determine the rest of Dean's career in the Pacific. On May 21, 1944 Dean was working on the ship and speaking with an enlisted man when suddenly a nearby explosion lifted the two men off their feet. Dean landed on the left open bow door, while the sailor was knocked down into the water. In shock, Dean helped the sailor out of the water onto the deck ramp before a small boat picked them up and took them to the hospital. Multiple explosions followed in the area, as a chain reaction swept through the closely docked ships. The LST was loaded with aviation fuel and mortar ammunition for the invasion. Although authorities never figured out the exact cause, the unloading of mortar ammunition or welding sparks could have caused the tragedy. Six LSTs and three other ships were lost, as well as 163 servicemen killed and 396 wounded. Amazingly, few people back in the US heard about the tragic incident. Later on, historians would name this event the "Secret Pearl Harbor" because the military tried to keep the incident quiet so that the Japanese would not know the size of the force in the Pacific. Dean was one of 396 wounded in the disaster. He had a burst eardrum and was hospitalized for a lacerated scalp. The doctors finally cleared him for full duty in September 1944, which meant that he had narrowly avoided participating in the bloody battle that finally captured Saipan.

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