



G30 Identification of an Unknown Sailor From the December 7, 1941, Attack on Pearl Harbor

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have gained an understanding of the forensic identification procedures used to identify the skeletal remains of a previously unidentified American sailor who was killed during the December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor. Attendees will also learn of efforts made to identify other previously unidentified victims of the Pearl Harbor attack.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by describing the forensic identification procedures used to identify Americans lost during past conflicts.

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, the tranquility of the island of Oahu, HI, was shattered by the Japanese attack on the American Pacific Fleet anchored at Pearl Harbor. By the end of the day, close to 2,400 military and civilian personnel were dead, killed in the attack which launched the United States into World War II.¹

One of the 162 ships and vessels within Pearl Harbor proper on that day was the U.S.S. *Curtiss* (AV-4), a seaplane tender. During the attack, the *Curtiss* was hit twice by Japanese aircraft.¹ The second contact resulted in the deaths of 21 sailors from the *Curtiss*. Two of the *Curtiss*' crew members were unaccounted for. One body was unidentifiable at the time and was ultimately buried as an unknown at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, also known as Punchbowl.

Pearl Harbor survivor Ray Emory was a young Seaman 1st Class stationed aboard the U.S.S. *Honolulu* which was in port at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. In recent years, Emory began researching the unknown victims of the attack on Pearl Harbor who were buried at Punchbowl. Through the efforts of Mr. Emory, the unknown remains of a sailor was disinterred and positively identified using forensic odontology, forensic anthropology, and mitochondrial DNA testing.

The American military has a solemn pledge to never leave one of its own on the battlefield. This includes using every available tool to identify its unknown war dead from past wars. Even though the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred almost three-quarters of a century ago, forensic science was used to identify an unknown American killed in the attack which launched the United States into World War II.

Reference:

1. Naval History and Heritage Command
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Odontology, Pearl Harbor, Identification