

Utah

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I'd like to introduce you to a largely forgotten heroine of the Pearl Harbor attack. She is a grey lady named Utah. She was commissioned in 1909, saw her first action in the 1914 American occupation of Veracruz and the ensuing Mexican Incursion against Pancho Villa. She served as a convoy escort during World War One. On December 7, 1941, she was living her scrap value assigned as a target ship, a trainer for the new Navy.

We often tend to remember the Arizona and the more than 1,000 who are entombed in her hull as the heroes of Pearl Harbor. There were others. If you ever get to Hawaii, pause at Ford Island and walk the rows of markers identifying the 409 sailors and Marines who died when the Oklahoma turned turtle. Then walk across to the other side of the island and see Utah.

On that Sunday morning, Utah was holding steam. She was too old to be granted things like power from the shore or cold iron. She had to keep up steam to run her generators and other assets, like hydraulics.

Her designation as a battleship had been stricken from the registry, and her logs no longer bore the coveted classification of BB-31. She was merely deemed an auxiliary vessel, AG-16. She took trainees out into the ocean to let them learn how to fire anti-aircraft guns. That morning, bombs and torpedoes began to fall

inside the harbor along Battleship Row, but Utah, no longer deemed a combatant, was moored alone on the other side of Ford Island. Her skeleton crew cut her lines, went to battle stations, and headed out for the channel in her self-assigned role as a target for Japanese pilots.

She almost made it. Utah was killed by torpedoes just short of the shipping channel. Her 54 dead knew they were fighting a losing battle, drawing fire to their ammunition bereft ship. Chief Watertender Peter Tomich, a Polish citizen, earned the Medal of Honor posthumously for his heroic attempt below decks to keep Utah afloat long enough for her survivors to abandon ship. He and 54 fellow crew members are still serving on the Utah.

The almost forgotten, rusting hulk of Utah still lies where she was dragged during cleanup efforts after the attack, just 20 yards from what had been her berth.