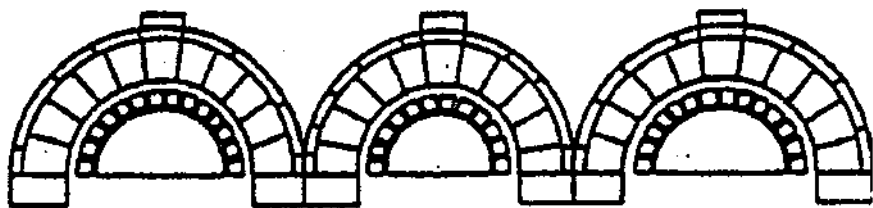


# Payne County Historical Review



*PAYNE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY*

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# An Oklahoman at Pearl Harbor

by

Billie D. Berger\*

My name is Billie David Berger; I'm also known as Bill. I was born May 30, 1919, near Yale, Oklahoma. My parents are Edward James Berger and Adah Botts Berger. Our family consisted of Lillian, Edna, myself and my younger brother, DeWitt. We lived on a farm and each one of us did our share of work, such as "chopping" cotton during the summer months, then picking cotton during the fall months. Each one of us children attended elementary school and graduated from Yale High School. My father had worked in the oil industry as a young man and bought two farms with his wages.

The Great Depression of 1929 hit with a devastating blow that inflicted pain and hardship on nearly every person in the United States, including our family. We now had to depend upon farming for subsistence. Many of the local farmers, including my family, raised a surplus of cattle, pigs, chickens, and garden produce and gave it to families in need. Thousands of workers were laid off and were traveling throughout the nation on freight trains or hitchhiking looking for employment of any kind. Farm work paid fifty cents per day and those jobs were scarce. At the age of sixteen, I hitchhiked to Kansas and got a job working in the wheat harvest for Arthur Dole, a relative of Bob Dole. This was my first job away from home and I was treated very well by the Doles.

Back in school that fall, I picked cotton after school hours and on weekends. I also picked up scrap iron and sold it to a local dealer, who was shipping it to Japan. We didn't realize that some of that iron would be used in war against us. One of our neighbors was a cable tool driller and he was kind enough to teach his son and me how to drill, which was a great asset to me in later times, when I worked in the oil and gas industry.

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\*Billie D. Berger is co-compiler and editor, with Gary Gibson, of a report on the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor called "Lest We Forget," published in 1991.



**Billie D. Berger**

In 1938 I graduated from high school and got a job working in the office of an insurance and loan agency at a starting salary of fifty cents per day. Later my salary was raised slightly, but I didn't intend to make this a career. By 1939 the war in Europe was getting serious, and it seemed sure that the United States would be involved. My attention began to focus on the U.S. Navy as a preference in case of war. On November 9, 1940, I was sworn into the United States

Navy at Dallas, Texas, and was told that I would receive twenty-one dollars per month and would be sent to San Diego, California, for "boot camp" training. I had a feeling of great pride in being a U.S. Navy sailor, then reality began to take over. My life would be changed forever—where I was headed and who would be telling me what to eat and wear.

In the morning I was put on a passenger train bound for San Diego, California, along with eleven other recruits. We were assigned sleeping berths in the Pullman train, but sleep just wouldn't happen because of the loud train whistle at each crossing and the clacking sound of the wheels passing over each rail joint. Finally, morning came and we ate breakfast together and talked about our sleepless night. We changed trains at El Paso, Texas, and had time to cross the border into Old Mexico, which was an interesting change from riding the train. Back on the train, we ate a good meal and felt more secure. Our next stop was in California, where we boarded a bus for the U.S. Naval Training Station in San Diego. During the bus ride, I got my first look at the beautiful Pacific Ocean and saw ships on the water.

At boot camp we lined up and one by one were issued hammocks, bedding, seabags, ditty bags, and clothing. Next, we changed into our U.S. Navy uniforms and put all civilian clothes in a Red Cross charity box. Next we were shown our quarters and the chow hall. As raw recruits, I and the others were at the bottom of the chain of command and were told what to do and how to act. We were shown how to make

our beds, fold clothing, how to dress and how to march. Next came those dreaded inoculation shots and marching on the grinder. The weather was damp and cold and most of us caught a cold and ran a temperature and were sent to the "sick bay" with what the doctors called "cat fever."

Saturday was designated as wash day, and we hand washed all of our soiled clothing and then hung the wet clothes on a line to dry. There were no automatic laundries for us. After four weeks, we were issued passes to go into San Diego for a few hours.

On Sunday we were given a religious choice of church to attend during the morning; then at noon we enjoyed a very good meal. Usually, after lunch we went to the auditorium, where some of the movie actors and actresses entertained us. I remember seeing Bob Hope, the Andrews Sisters, Jerry Colonna, and many others during my stay at San Diego. My company was No. 94, which was made up of 136 recruits. Our drill officers were very professional and pushed us to the limit. Our company won an award for marching and got to be filmed in a movie that was being shot in part at the Naval Training Station. The movie was *Abbott and Costello in the Navy*.

During the last days of boot camp training, we were given an IQ test, and those with high grades were given an option for specialized training that would last several months. I was put into Group II (b) Communication School. During that time, I was promoted to Seaman Second Class. I graduated with a final mark of 3.84, which qualified me for opportunities in Naval Air, Submarine Service, or aboard a ship. I got a leave to return to Oklahoma and visit my family before being assigned my next duty.

After returning to San Diego, I filled out a request form for the type of duty that I would like and I asked for flight training, sea duty, and to be assigned to the Asiatic Fleet. They assigned me to the U.S.S. Boise, which was in the Asiatic Fleet at that time, so I boarded the U.S.S. Wharton for Honolulu to be transferred to the U.S.S. Boise later. After arriving in Pearl Harbor, I was put on the U.S.S. Honolulu to await transfer to the Asiatic Fleet. Meanwhile, I was promoted to Seaman First Class and became a Quartermaster Striker. After several trips to sea with other ships doing maneuver exercises, we returned to

Pearl Harbor and tied up to Pier 21, and the U.S.S. St. Louis tied up alongside our starboard side. The U.S.S. St. Louis was a light cruiser, the same as the U.S.S. Honolulu. The U.S.S. Honolulu shut down all eight boilers and connected to the dock for all power and utilities. This was the first of December, 1941.

My Division Officer told me that my transfer to the U.S.S. Boise had been cancelled, so I requested flight training in the United States. I was told that there would be an opening in February and it was possible that I could get it. Saturday, December 6, I left the ship on liberty and went to the city of Honolulu and sent my girlfriend a telegram for her birthday and returned back aboard ship before midnight.

The U.S.S. Honolulu was commissioned in 1938 and named for the capitol of the Territory of Hawaii; its number was CL-48 and its nickname was "Blue Goose." The ship was 600 feet long and 61 and 1/2 feet wide at midship. Top speed was 32 1/2 knots and the ship was powered by eight oil-burning boilers turning four propellers. The main battery was 15 guns of 6-inch caliber and eight antiaircraft guns of 5-inch caliber with 30- and 50-caliber machine guns. The ship could accommodate from 975 to 1200 personnel.

Early morning on the 7th, I got out of bed, ate breakfast and then went up on the bridge about 0730. At 0800 I was to relieve the quartermaster on duty with the officer-of-the-deck. Just as I started to leave the bridge, I looked to the north and observed several airplanes approaching. Suddenly, one plane dropped a bomb that hit in the water near the battleship U.S.S. Oklahoma and did no damage. Then bombs began hitting our ships and it was obvious that something was drastically wrong. As the planes made a turn, we could see the red ball markings and then there was no doubt that they were Japanese. General quarters was shortly after 0755 and all hands made a mad dash for their battle station. My station was in the conning tower that was located one deck below the bridge. Captain Harold Dodd, Billy Long, and I were in the conning tower together. We were able to see the enemy planes dropping bombs on Ford Island and our ships as well as torpedo planes attacking our battleships that were anchored on the south side of Ford Island. I was unable to see the ships on the north side of Ford Island where the U.S.S. Utah was located. My vision was con-



*Courtesy United States Naval Institute*

Photographed during the Japanese attack, the U.S.S. Oklahoma lies capsized alongside the U.S.S. Maryland.

centrated on "Battleship Row," east to the U.S.S. Solace west to 1010 dock and south to the submarine base.

Ships were exploding and burning while rescue boats and tug boats were desperately trying to save as many lives as possible. Oil and aviation fuel was burning on the water near some ships as men were jumping over the side of exploding ships. Death and destruction was visible in all directions. Black heavy smoke was all around our ship. There is no way that words can describe what was happening. I could not believe what my eyes were seeing, nor the sounds I was hearing. This was the most one-sided, murderous slaughter that happened to our military. Our captain made a statement that we who survived will hunt down those cowardly heathen terrorists for committing their barbaric sneak attack. We went from disbelief to frustration and then to anger. We were wanting to fight. We were not aware of what had happened just hours before 0755. Later we learned that at 0342 the U.S.S. Condor, a coastal minesweeper, sighted the periscope of an unidentified submarine near Pearl Harbor entrance and the U.S.S. Condor sent a

visual signal to the destroyer U.S.S. Ward. The U.S.S. Ward immediately instituted search and at 0637 sighted the periscope of the submarine that was trailing the U.S.S. Antares. At 0640 the U.S.S. Ward commenced its attack that was believed to be successful. At 0720 the 14th Naval District sent instructions out to verify this report. Another incident that we were unaware of was that our Army had a radar unit located on the north end of Oahu Island. This radar was in the experimental stage and was in operation during night hours only. As dawn approached, one of the operators observed strange looking objects. He called his superior officer and was told that 12 of our B-17 bombers were headed for Pearl Harbor and that was what he must have seen. The officer told the operator to shut down the radar and return to base.

Captain Dodd began receiving sketchy reports of what damage was being inflicted, but it was later that the reports were more in detail, such as: between the time of 0755 to 0825 combined torpedo planes, dive bombers, and horizontal bombers were hitting Hickam Field and Ford Island, and the torpedo planes and dive bombers began concentrating their attack on ships moored in Pearl Harbor. About 18 planes attacked Hickam Field and nine dive bombers from out of the northwest bombed and strafed the Naval Air Station, damaging planes on the ground and in hangers. A wave of torpedo planes came from the southwest and attacked the battleships U.S.S. California, U.S.S. Oklahoma, and U.S.S. West Virginia, resulting in the sinking of all three. Another wave of torpedo planes was directed at the U.S.S. Helena and the U.S.S. Oglala. Both were hit and the U.S.S. Oglala capsized one hour later. The next wave of torpedo planes came from the northwest and attacked the U.S.S. Utah and the U.S.S. Raleigh. The U.S.S. Utah capsized and the U.S.S. Raleigh was damaged. The dive bombing attack was most damaging against the U.S.S. Arizona and resulted in its sinking. Oil fires from the U.S.S. Arizona caused damage to the U.S.S. Tennessee. Other dive bombers directed their attack against the U.S.S. Helena, U.S.S. Oglala, U.S.S. California, U.S.S. West Virginia, and U.S.S. Tennessee. Another wave of dive bombers attacked the U.S.S. Shaw, U.S.S. Pennsylvania, U.S.S. Cassin, and the U.S.S. Downes. The U.S.S. Pennsylvania was damaged and the U.S.S. Cassin and U.S.S. Downes were damaged beyond repair. The U.S.S. Shaw was severely



damaged, as well. Another wave of dive bombers attacked the U.S.S. Curtis, which was moored in Middle Loch. Three dive bombers attacked the U.S.S. Utah, which had been torpedoed, and also attacked the U.S.S. Raleigh. Horizontal bombers at an estimated altitude of 12,000 feet bombed the U.S.S. California, yard docks, and battleship berths.

The Japanese launched their initial attack as a surprise, but battleship ready machine guns opened fire at once, bringing down two planes and damaging others. Within five minutes, most anti-aircraft batteries were firing, and cruisers and destroyers were all firing within minutes. At about 0837 the U.S.S. Monaghan observed an enemy submarine under fire from both the U.S.S. Curtis and U.S.S. Tangier and at 0843 rammed the sub and dropped two depth charges, which sank it.

Between the time of 0840 and 0915, a group of horizontal bombers from the south dropped bombs on the U.S.S. Tennessee and U.S.S. West Virginia. Another group of horizontal bombers dropped bombs on the U.S.S. Oglala, U.S.S. Helena, U.S.S. Tennessee, and U.S.S. West Virginia. A third group hit the U.S.S. California with a 15-inch projectile that penetrated to the second deck and exploded. Other groups dropped bombs on the U.S.S. Shaw, U.S.S. Pennsylvania, U.S.S. Utah, U.S.S. California, U.S.S. Helena, U.S.S. Oglala, U.S.S. Tennessee, U.S.S. West Virginia, U.S.S. Arizona, and the U.S.S. Vestal. An estimated 30 horizontal bombers and some dive bombers were engaged in this strike. During this time the U.S.S. Nevada cleared berth F-8 and proceeded down the south channel, where considerable damage was received in the vicinity of Yard Floating Drydock No. 2. In spite of the fact that the U.S.S. Nevada's bridge and forestructure were ablaze, the ship attempted to negotiate the turn in the channel and was grounded. At about the same time, the U.S.S. Vestal cleared the burning U.S.S. Arizona and was grounded near Old Aiea Railroad Station. The U.S.S. Neosho, U.S.S. Monaghan, U.S.S. Blue, and U.S.S. Henly were underway during this time.

Between the time 0915 and 0945, two groups of dive bombers from the southeast attacked ships at 1010 Dock, Navy Yard facilities and the ships in Navy yard berths. One bomb passed through the edge of the concrete dock of Berth B-21 and exploded under water between

the U.S.S. Honolulu and the dock, causing internal damage to the structure and electrical cables of the ship. The U.S.S. St. Louis was tied to our starboard side, but was able to get underway before the U.S.S. Honolulu was damaged. Another group of planes from the southwest repeated a previous attack on the southern portion of Ford Island, Floating Drydock No. 2 and No. 1. A fourth group of dive bombers from the west attacked the U.S.S. Shaw, U.S.S. Helena, U.S.S. Oglala and battleship row. Another group from the northwest strafed and bombed Ford Island and ships moored in Middle Loch. A northern group attacked the U.S.S. Raleigh and the destroyers nested in berths to the north of Ford Island. The seventh group attacked from the north and attacked other destroyers. The eighth group attacked the battleships. The ninth and remaining group approached from the east and attacked the U.S.S. California and the U.S.S. Arizona. The tug U.S.S. Sotoyomo was sunk. By 0945 the attack was ending. However, men were still dying and ships and buildings were still burning and exploding.

Ninety-six ships were at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and of these, 18 were sunk or seriously damaged. The US Navy lost 92 planes and had 31 damaged. The U.S. Army lost 96 planes and had 128 damaged. U.S. Army military bases Schofield Barracks, Fort Shafter, and Fort Kamehameha were hit. Also hit were Hickam Field, Wheeler Field and Bellows Field. The U.S. Marine Corps bases hit were Ewa Marine Corps Air Station and Marine barracks. U.S. Navy bases hit were Pearl Harbor Naval Base, Pearl Harbor Navy Yard, Pearl Harbor Submarine Base, Kaneohe Naval Base, and Cincpacfit.

The Japanese lost nine fighters, 15 dive bombers, and five torpedo bombers out of 353 planes from six aircraft carriers.

Our battle had just begun. Almost 3,000 men were dead and hundreds injured. There were no slackers or cowards; everyone wanted to get a chance to avenge our loss. There were rumors circulating that the Japanese had a landing party ready to invade the Island of Oahu. This, if true, would be another tragedy that we must face, but this was only a rumor that didn't happen. Within a very short time after the last Japanese attack, we began the awesome task of clean-up and damage repair. I had a very sickening feeling as the dead and injured were being taken care of. My stomach seemed to be in knots and I felt like nothing

ever before experienced in my life.

In Washington, D.C., on December 8, 1941, Congress proclaimed the existence of a state of war between the United States and the Japanese empire 33 minutes after the dramatic moment when President Roosevelt stood before a joint session to pledge that we will triumph, "So help us, God." The Senate acted first, adopting the resolution by a unanimous roll call vote of 82 to 0. The final house vote was announced as 388 to 1. The lone negative vote was cast by representative Jeannette Rankin, Republican from Montana. We wondered if she was politically driven or stupid. What if we had not stopped Admiral Yamamoto, who was the architect of the Pearl Harbor sneak attack and commander-in-chief of the combined fleet of the Imperial Japanese Navy? Yamamoto knew the United States well, having attended Harvard University and having served as naval attache in Washington, D.C. He believed in Japan's right to world leadership. War is a horrible thing, but what would have happened if the Japanese were not stopped?

The U.S.S. Honolulu was rocked by the explosion and whipped longitudinally, with the node of vibration amidships and equal amplitudes fore and aft. Structural damage to the ship was an indentation in the side just above the first platform deck to within six feet of the keel, an area about 52 by 20 feet. This severe distortion of the shell caused leakage through pulled rivets. The outboard bulkhead of the powder magazines was forced in about three feet. The deck in these ammunition magazines buckled sharply and was wrinkled. Had a spark or static electricity ignited the powder in these magazines, we would have gone up in a fire ball.

Two magazines were flooded immediately through breaks in the severely distorted second platform deck. The fuel oil tanks in the double bottom were ruptured and caused oil to run out of the tanks. Flooding of the wiring passages completely grounded power leads to Turret II and partially grounded those in Turret I. All damage to the U.S.S. Honolulu was repairable, but time consuming. The Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations, directed that a written report of the war damage be submitted to the Bureau of Ships as soon as possible. The U.S.S. Honolulu submitted War Damage Report No. 1.

On December 13 our ship entered one of the dry docks at Pearl Harbor for repair. Work was on a 24 hour, seven days per week schedule until January 2, 1942. Orders were soon received to escort a convoy back to the United States. We arrived at San Francisco after a nine day crossing, and preparations were soon made for us to continue as a convoy escort to Australia. We departed San Francisco on January 30 and sailed in a zigzag course set for Melbourne, Australia. On the tenth day of February, 1942, we crossed the equator and were duly initiated as "pollywogs" then to become "shellbacks." The trip from San Francisco took 28 days and ours was the first ship loaded with war supplies to reach the land down under. We were there nine days. We took another convoy on a course for New Caladonia and put into Neurea on March 12. The U.S.S. Honolulu was underway three days later for Tutuila, Samoa, alone. I went ashore at Samoa and enjoyed meeting the friendly people and seeing this beautiful island. We returned to Pearl Harbor and arrived there March 27. The Japanese were extending their three-pronged drive toward Australia in the south, Hawaii in the east, and the Alaskan peninsula to the north. The U.S.S. Honolulu sailed for Dutch Harbor in company with other ships, but first we docked at Kodiak Island. We maneuvered in the gulf south of Kodiak Island when two of our planes got lost in a dense fog and crashed, killing both pilots and radiomen. We returned to Women's Bay in Kodiak to refuel. We continued to operate in and out of Kodiak until July 16, at which time we joined the U.S.S. Indianapolis, U.S.S. St. Louis, U.S.S. Louisville, and U.S.S. Nashville. The task force pointed west in an attempt to bombard Japanese positions on the island of Kiska, but failed due to poor weather conditions. The fog was so heavy that we could not get the necessary air support.

On August 7 the same force of ships proceeded to Kiska Island in a heavy fog, but this time we succeeded in bombarding the island. The enemy retaliated with half a dozen salvos from shore batteries. Then we opened up with our six-inch main batteries. Several enemy fighter planes were driven off by our antiaircraft fire. We shot down one enemy plane and left their shore facilities burning. This bombardment lasted about one hour.

August 1942, Captain Robert W. Hayler, USN, relieved Captain

Harold Dodd as commanding officer of the U.S.S. Honolulu. Captain Hayler took our ship to Kuluk Bay, Adak Island, in the Aleution Islands, where we screened for the first American landings in this area on August 21, 1942. This base would provide a jumping off base for landings on Attu and Kiska. After refueling at Dutch Harbor, the U.S.S. Honolulu set a course for California on September 20 for repairs at the Navy Yard, Mare Island.

After the U.S.S. Honolulu arrived at Mare Island, I called Miss Twylla Briggs and asked her to come to California so we could get married. She came by passenger train and then we went to Nevada and got married on October 11, 1942. We went back to sea on the 19th and Twylla returned to Oklahoma. We arrived at Noumes and then were ordered to Espiritu Santo, where on November 26, Rear Admiral Tisdale brought his staff aboard ship and hoisted his flag. Three days later we were joined with the U.S.S. Minneapolis, U.S.S. New Orleans, U.S.S. Pensacola, U.S.S. Northampton, and five destroyers. We sailed north to Lunga Point near Guadalcanal Island, where the Japanese were waiting. The battle of Tassafaronge began on the night of November 30, shortly after 2300. The "Tokyo Express" was trying to reinforce their positions near Lunga Point and we had to stop them. Our destroyers first made contact with a four ship formation and launched a torpedo attack. Four minutes later, the heavy cruisers began firing; two minutes later, our ship opened up with all fifteen guns of our main battery on the nearest Japanese destroyer. We made direct hits as our five-inch battery illuminated our targets with star shells. Minutes later, the U.S.S. Minneapolis and U.S.S. New Orleans were hit by torpedoes. Both ships appeared to be on fire. Captain Hayler took the helm and turned hard right and avoided a torpedo hit to our ship. Our main battery trained on a destroyer about 7,500 yards away and sank it. We then trained our main battery on another destroyer about 7,000 yards away and made direct hits. The area was patrolled until 0800 and then secured from General Quarters and headed back to Espiritu Santo.

We won a very decisive battle against the Japanese Navy and wanted to boast about it, but were not permitted to write and tell about it. The U.S.S. Honolulu was now based at Espiritu Santo and made several runs at the enemy forces from there, only to be met by enemy

planes and submarines. Meanwhile, the New Georgia campaign was about to get underway. On the night of May 13, a heavy bombardment was carried out by the U.S.S. Honolulu, U.S.S. Helena, and the U.S.S. Nashville in Kula Gulf, Kolombangars, and New Georgia Islands.

Attack operations continued until the night of July 4, 1943, when a force covered Allied landings at Rice Anchorage on the New Georgia side of Kula Gulf. The Vila-Stammere plantation areas were being bombarded as planned until the U.S.S. Strong had to fall out of formation after being torpedoed and then sunk. The next day the U.S.S. Honolulu, U.S.S. Helena, and U.S.S. St. Louis retired to the south between San Cristobal and Guadalcanal. A dispatch was received directing our task force to cover Kula Gulf against a Japanese task force which was due to run that night. Visibility was about 4,000 yards, with squally winds up to 15 knots. The first radar contact was made shortly after 0030 the morning of July 6 when a group of three or four ships appeared standing out of Kula Gulf. Immediately, a battle formation was assumed and shortly before 0200 the order to commence firing was received. Very shortly, a reversal of course was ordered as a torpedo wake was sighted on the port bow, which missed. Six more torpedoes were sighted that also missed. We kept firing until all the enemy ships disappeared; then a second group of ships was located at 11,000 yards. Our turrets were trained on an enemy destroyer, which was dead in the water within minutes. Our star shells illuminated a surfaced submarine which was hit by two of our fifteen gun salvos and it exploded. We were scoring devastating hits on any enemy craft that came within our range. The Japanese were also scoring hits, as the U.S.S. Helena had been hit and sunk. I was on the bridge and watched the U.S.S. Helena sink as men were trying to abandon it. Two of our destroyers, the U.S.S. Radford and U.S.S. Nicholas, were dispatched to pick up survivors. One enemy cruiser and two destroyers approached the sinking U.S.S. Helena, but were driven off by the U.S.S. Radford and U.S.S. Nicholas. The U.S.S. Honolulu and U.S.S. St. Louis headed back to Tulagi Harbor, Solomon Islands. When daylight came, we were attacked by enemy planes and submarines while still at sea. One of the most beautiful sights that I ever watched was when one of our United States P-38 twin engine planes came to our rescue and out-gunned and

outmaneuvered the Japs.

At Tulagi we refueled and took on ammunition and were ready to do battle with the "heathens." The opportunity came on the night of July 12 in the second battle of Kula Gulf. The U.S.S. St. Louis and His Majesty's New Zealand ship Leander were steaming astern of our ship when one of our Navy patrol planes made contact with one Jap light cruiser and five destroyers. Upon closing the initial 26 miles between forces, a battle disposition was formed and the cruiser was designated as the U.S.S. Honolulu's target. Our task force also had eleven United States destroyers with us. At 0105 July 13 the leading destroyer reported sight contact and all the front line destroyers were ordered to attack with torpedoes. Five minutes later, the Jap cruiser illuminated our leading destroyer as the U.S.S. Honolulu opened fire with her main batteries. The third salvo caused the enemy cruiser to burst into flames and it was soon dead in the water. Our guns were then shifted to the leading Jap destroyer, which was hit and disappeared. Our guns were again shifted to the remaining four Jap destroyers that were retreating to the north. The H.M.S. Leander was hit by a torpedo, putting her out of action.

During the battle, we lost contact with four of our destroyers as they were chasing fleeing Jap ships. Later, a contact was made which was thought to be our missing destroyers. Star shells failed to help identify the four ships as friendly or enemy, but very soon we knew they were enemy as the water was alive with torpedoes. The U.S.S. St. Louis was hit, but what damage was done was not known at that time. At 0211 a torpedo struck the starboard side of the U.S.S. Honolulu between the bow and number one turret. The force of the explosion raised the bow more than four feet and made a large hole underneath. About ninety feet of the bow was bent down over the hole and damaged the underbody supporting frames. We felt the jarring and crushing force of the torpedo. Another flash off the port quarter of our ship was the destroyer U.S.S. Gwin, third victim of the Jap torpedoes. After being hit, the U.S.S. Gwin was out of control and was bearing down on our crippled ship. Our helmsman turned the rudder hard right and the U.S.S. Gwin passed about fifty yards away from us. We were then struck by another torpedo in the stern. Fortunately, this one was a dud.

Had it exploded, it is certain that the U.S.S. Honolulu would have sunk immediately. The torpedo hit in the area where all of our aviation gasoline was stored. The warhead of the torpedo had penetrated about two feet inside the ship's hull and was held there in place by the drive of its propeller. When the propeller stopped, the torpedo dropped out and sunk, leaving a hole about two feet in diameter.

Our task force left the Kula Gulf area and headed to Tulagi, where the United States had a Seabee base. The H.M.S. Leander was towed to Tulagi and the U.S.S. Gwin was being towed but later was scuttled when Jap planes attacked. A temporary bow was put on the U.S.S. Honolulu at Tulagi, and while we were there Admiral Bull Halsey came to observe our damage. We suffered major damages, but we also dealt a blow to the enemy. A number of firsts can be credited to the U.S.S. Honolulu's record, such as turning in the first War Damage Report after the Pearl Harbor attack, making the first trip to Melbourne, being the first to bombard Kiski, and fighting the first night battle using radar exclusively to control firing.

Admiral Ainsworth, who had replaced Rear Admiral Tisdale on the U.S.S. Honolulu earlier, brought much distinction upon himself and was presented with the Navy Cross and the Distinguished Service Medal. Captain Hayler had earned the Navy Cross and a gold star and also received the Silver Star Medal for his outstanding performances during the Battle of Tassafaronga, the first and second battles of Kula Gulf. Captain Hayler took no end of opportunities to praise his officers and men. I felt a deep respect for Captain Robert W. Hayler and do believe his decisions during the battle saved my life as well as many others. Captain Hayler would take time to visit with the crew members while on the bridge when we were not in battle and I will never forget some of the conversations that I had with him.

The U.S.S. Honolulu was now ready to make her way back to the United States for repairs. We sailed to Espiritu Santo from Tulagi and went into a dry-dock before starting the long trip to Pearl Harbor. On August 16, 1943, we entered Pearl Harbor, where a new bow was already being constructed. After installing the new bow, we headed to Mare Island shipyard in California. I called my wife, Twylla, from Mare Island, and she came to meet me. We had not seen each other



since October 1942. It was September when we arrived at Mare Island. Our executive officer said that a large portion of the ship's crew would be transferred while the ship was being repaired. I asked about flight training, but there were no immediate openings, so I requested submarine training at New London, Connecticut. I was accepted to proceed to New London, with a thirty day leave to be spent in Oklahoma while en route to the submarine training base.

I arrived at the Navy submarine base and reported in to the personnel office in October and as usual the "hurry up and wait" rule applied here also. After several days had passed, I met with the medical staff for a physical examination. I didn't pass the physical examination and was sent to the U.S. Naval Hospital in Rhode Island. The medical staff recommended that I return to the submarine base and be put on limited light duty. There, I was assigned to work with Chief Petty Officer Bruno. He was working with the U.S. Navy Intelligence and the shore patrol. This was good duty and I hoped to stay at New London for a long time, but was told that my next assignment would be at the U.S. Naval Recruiting Station, Birmingham, Alabama. Twylla came to Alabama and we got to live as husband and wife for the first time. Our first child, Nancy Gwynn, was born June 20, 1944, in Birmingham. After two more trips to U.S. Naval hospitals, Twylla and Nancy went to Oklahoma and I went to the U.S. Naval Hospital at Memphis, Tennessee, where I received my honorable discharge on September 18, 1945. I returned to Yale, Oklahoma, where I would return to civilian life again.

# The Rice-Kerby Cabin: Payne County's Oldest House

by

Diane Davis White\*

The Rice-Kerby cabin was originally located on the corner of Highway 51 and Highway 18 and was built by a man named Pawnee Rice.

In May of 1949 William Sherman Kerby gave an interview to John Melton wherein he stated:



That I, Sherman T. Kerby of age 84 and a citizen of Payne County, Oklahoma, do hereby state and verify that: I first came to what is now Payne County in January 1893 into what was then Pawnee lands, having special permission of the Pawnee Indian Agency to do work for the Indians, building houses, cultivating, digging water wells, building fences, during which time I made acquaintance with many old Pawnee Indians, including Nelson (Pawnee) Rice, Chief Curly-Chief, John Brown, Little Chief, Spotted Horse, Walking-Sun, Robert Taylor, Setten Bull, of whom the last four were Union soldiers during the Civil War.

Pawnee Rice lived like a white man and traded among the local tribes as well as the white population that came with the 1889 land run.

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\*This article was prepared for a program on the Rice-Kerby cabin given by Wanda Raper at a meeting of the Payne County Historical Society on July 22, 2001. Ms. Raper is a granddaughter of Sherman T. Kerby. Diane Davis White, the author of the article, is a great-granddaughter of Mary Jane Rice Davis, who was the last person to live in the cabin. Mary Jane Rice Davis is Wanda Raper's great-grandmother, as well. The Rice family of Mary Jane Rice Davis had no connection to Nelson "Pawnee" Rice; it is apparently just a coincidence that the first person and the last person to live in the cabin had the same last names. Diane White expresses great appreciation to Wanda Raper for her help in the preparation of this article.

He was killed – some say by the outlaw Red Buck Waightman – and the property was eventually purchased by Sherman and his wife, Mary Nancy, whose relations and descendents have used the log cabin at various times down through the years.

In his interview, Mr. Kerby stated further that:

Pawnee Rice was shot by Red Buck in the fall of about 1894. Buck reportedly boasted of the shooting before witnesses. Rice had walked out on his porch early in the morning where Buck waylaid him. I helped bury Rice on top of the west mound of the Twin Mounds. His pearl-handled revolvers were buried with him. The government reserved 10 acres on top of the mound for an Indian cemetery.

Mrs. Macie Myatt wrote the following list of persons that she knew of who had used the cabin, and also mentioned the condition and furnishings of the dwelling in the early days. According to the list, the first family to use the cabin – after it was purchased in 1920 by Sherman Kerby – was Oscar Boyd, along with his wife and a son named Cleo. It is not known how long they stayed, but their tenancy was followed by that of a gentleman by the name of Sam Turner and his wife, and again, we do not know the length of the tenancy.

The third known occupant was a Mr. Williams, whose name was listed as "Negro Williams." It is not known if this was his name or if it referred to his race, as it was not uncommon during that era for blacks to be referred to as Negroes. Mr. Williams may well have been a farm worker whose pay included board, which would have been tenancy in the cabin – although this is not known for certain.

As in the case of Mr. Williams, the first two occupants – the Boyd and Turner families – may have been farm workers hired by Sherman T. and who used the cabin as the only dwelling available that was convenient to their jobs. The other possible scenario would be simply that each family rented the property for a brief time, but it is more likely that they earned their livelihood on the farm, transportation being a scarcity during those difficult times.

Next came Sherman and Mary Nancy's daughter, Verna, and her husband, Vannah Harris. Their occupancy was probably a matter of expediency for a newly married couple wanting privacy, but this is

only a matter of speculation, of course, as there is no written record to prove or disprove such a claim. While living in the log cabin, Mrs. Harris gave birth to a son, Sherman Wayne Harris, on February 27, 1922. The approximate length of the prior tenancies being very short is proven by the birth of this child, a mere two years after the property was purchased.



Inside the Rice-Kerby cabin are, from the left, Carla Chlouber, Wanda Raper, and Diane Davis White. Members of the Payne County Historical Society toured the cabin and learned about its history at a meeting on July 22, 2001.

Verna Harris's brothers, N.C. and Dewey, "batched it" there for a while after their sister and her small family departed. The brothers no doubt wanted some freedom from living under their father's watchful eye in the main house and the cabin provided them with the independence they were craving. There are no wild stories, however, of that period in the cabin's history – or none that we've heard, at any rate.

Sherman's mother-in-law, Mary Jane Rice Davis, was the last occupant of the cabin, and as far as we can determine, moved in there around 1935 or 1936. She remained as occupant of the cabin – which had been renovated and made comfortable for her by Sherman – until just before her death in 1944.

Mary Jane came to Oklahoma as a pioneer, traveling with her husband James Washington Davis, and six of their eleven children. They came from Iowa in a covered wagon and homesteaded about three miles east of Ingalls next to the first Kerby homestead on what is now 19th avenue, once the Ingalls Road. Mr. Davis died in 1923, leaving his widow with only a small pension and their homestead, and a bank account which was worth about \$1500, according the probate records. He was a veteran of the Union Army, having served during the Civil War with the Iowa 6th Infantry, Company H, and he was discharged honorably just before they reached Atlanta for a disability sustained on that long and treacherous forced march to the sea. After his death, Mary Jane rented out the farm and went to live with various of her children, until about 1935. Sherman decided to renovate the cabin and

did so, with the object of moving his mother-in-law there. This was a decidedly good move, for it brought her close by, where her oldest daughter, Mary Nancy, could look after her, and this kept her in a permanent home where she could be independent, as well.

I would like to take a moment here to describe the cabin itself, which was in vast disrepair at the time it was acquired by the family. Mrs. Myatt described the dwelling in the following list of items, as though she were preparing them for an interview with the press, which she may well have been doing because the family was very prominent in the area and known for great works, good deeds and all manner of community service.

1. When cabin was built: Approximately 1876 by Pawnee Rice.
2. Original location: On Hwy 51 at Hwy 18.
3. Listing of the occupants, (which we have already gone over)
4. What did cabin look like on inside (furnishings): The walls were white washed and sometimes covered with newspapers, also with building paper. Furnishings were whatever tenants brought with them.
5. What heating facility was used: Wood was used for heating, oil stove for cooking.
6. Roof: Clapboard roof put on with handmade nails.
7. Loft: A ladder to the loft was nailed to wall, or otherwise stair steps nailed to wall.
8. Did people sleep in loft: Yes.

The cabin was a ruin by the time that Sherman decided to fix it up and he put shingle siding on it, closed off the loft – which had most likely become a dangerous place full of rotting timbers – and tore down the dilapidated lean-to shed on the west side of the building that had served as a kitchen. Since his mother-in-law was too feeble to climb stairs to the loft, there was no need for it, and keeping it heated in the winter would be a waste of fuel; therefore no repairs were attempted. The aforementioned kitchen was probably riddled with termites and dry rot and too far gone to repair, and since there was just one occupant for the cabin, there was no need to build another room.

Mary Jane Rice Davis lived in the cabin until a few months before her death in 1944 at the age of 103. During her tenancy, many of her grandchildren came to visit for extended periods, including Jim Doty,

a favorite grandchild who came to stay quite often. Another favored grandchild, Willa Cleveland, stayed with Mary Jane for a time. Gus Rice, who lived in the Duncan Bridge area, would come to stay with her as well. Since the only bed in the cabin was a trundle, with a roll out bed beneath it, it was a cozy little space for Mary and one or two grandchildren. She loved the company and was seldom left to her own devices with such a large family. At her death, it was reported that Mary Jane and James Washington Davis had eleven children, fifty-five grandchildren, over 100 great-grandchildren, and numerous great-great-grandchildren.

Mary Jane and James Washington Davis are buried in Fairlawn Cemetery in Cushing, Oklahoma. A Civil War marker is placed next to James, denoting his veteran status. These two hardy pioneers were typical of the proud, courageous people who founded this great state of Oklahoma.

Sherman and Nancy Kerby are also buried in Cushing in the Zion section of the same cemetery. Many of the Kerby, Davis, and Rice families are buried there as well, although Minnie Icy Kerby, eldest child of Sherman and Nancy, was buried at Ingalls. She came in the covered wagon with her sister Macie and her parents to the Indian Territory. It took them 49 days to come from Putnam County, Missouri. They camped on Boomer Creek shortly before moving to the original site of Falls City, located south of Ingalls. There they took up their occupation of farming and raising stock.

While living in this community, they were thrown in contact with a group of supposed cowboys, who later proved to be the infamous Doolin-Dalton gang. Mr. Kerby was plowing in a field very close to Ingalls when he heard the fight between the outlaws and the U.S. Marshals. Unhitching a mule from the plow, he rushed toward Ingalls, meeting three of the outlaws before he arrived there.

Sherman Kerby further stated in his interview regarding that incident:

On September 1st, 1893, Bill Vickrey and I were finished threshing on my place and were riding back to his dad's place toward Ingalls. On the way we began hearing Winchesters popping like firecrackers and we supposed some of the boys were shooting just for fun. When we got to the Vickrey farm, we met Bittercreek [Newcomb] coming on his horse, leaning

over in his saddle with a bullet wound in his thigh. I noticed the magazine was shot off his gun and that he was bleeding profusely. He told us that they had a hell of a fight and that he didn't know how many got killed. The Vickreys began to pour buckets of cold water on the wound while Bittercreek was still on horseback and Bill and I mounted our horses again and started off full-speed for Ingalls. Bittercreek was kept in hiding in the vicinity of the Vickrey place and other nearby farms for several days. One time it was in a hay-stack and I recall smelling anti-septic along the trail through there later after he was treated by Dr. Selph of Ingalls."

Mr. Kerby went on to describe the scene at Ingalls and stated that he saw Shadley's wounds – so close together that you could cover them with a tea saucer – and that he watched them load the wounded marshals into wagons for the trip back to Stillwater. His recollections of the times are rich with history first hand and invaluable as such.

Many of the descendents of the Kerby, Davis, and Rice families are still living in and around this area, practicing many professions and enjoying widely varied lifestyles. Still, we are a family and, as such, some of us are present here today to help commemorate the history of this old building that has seen so many years of service and is hopefully destined to be a teaching museum and workshop to aid the young in keeping alive the rich heritage of the pioneers.



Shown from the left are Alice Cussner, Wanda Raper, and Dr. Lawrence Erwin.

## **Donation to the Jim Thorpe Memorial Foundation and Yale Historical Society**

At the July 22, 2001 meeting of the Payne County Historical Society, the Society presented a donation to the Jim Thorpe Memorial Foundation and Yale Historical Society to help with the preservation of the Rice-Kerby cabin, Payne County's oldest home.

Accepting the donation, which was presented by PCHS treasurer Dr. Lawrence Erwin, were Alice Cussner, president of the Jim Thorpe Memorial Foundation, and Wanda Raper, granddaughter of Mr. and Mrs. Sherman Kerby, who donated the cabin. The Rice-Kerby cabin, originally located on Highway 51 west of Yale, now stands next to the Jim Thorpe home in Yale.



## Stillwater's Unreported 1958 Sit-in

by

Dale Chlouber

Higher education in Oklahoma was officially integrated in 1955, but in some cases businesses lagged behind the schools in treating all people equally. This was true in Stillwater, as elsewhere.

In 1958 I was a student at Oklahoma State University and belonged to the Human Relations Group, which was sponsored by the YMCA and YWCA. The group met on campus in Old Central and had the goal of improving understanding and acceptance among racial groups. Along with a black girl named Archie Stevenson, I was co-chairman of the group.

Very few students were interested in our organization, but for each meeting we continued to multilith posters on the second floor of Old Central and post them around campus. We knew we wouldn't get many people to attend our meetings, but we thought it was important to call attention to our goals.

In the spring of 1958, the Human Relations Group held a workshop to promote "understanding of our fellow man." Among the speakers was OSU sociology professor Leo May, whose speech was titled "Pressured or Prejudiced." Other speakers were Jimmy Stewart, president of the Oklahoma City branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and M. B. Tolson, the poet laureate of Liberia and a professor of English at Langston University.

I invited OSU president Oliver S. Willham to the workshop, but he responded with a letter expressing regret that he could not attend and wishing us "a very successful day."

In September of 1958, the Human Relations Group resumed its meetings for the fall semester. Our meetings were usually attended by seven or eight students, although sometimes as many as ten or twelve might be there. We began talking about how all students, including Negro students, should be able to go to the drugstore on Campus Corner and have a coke. I remembered the Korean War, and I thought that if Negroes could serve their country and risk their lives, they ought to be able to have a coke at the campus drugstore, which was still segre-

gated and did not serve blacks. We decided to plan a sit-in. The NAACP had recently organized a sit-in at a drugstore in Oklahoma City, the first in the nation, and I'm sure the news reports of that sit-in inspired us to take similar action.

Our first attempt at a sit-in at the drugstore failed. We were refused service and left soon after that. The committee had another meeting and talked about what we should do about the situation. We didn't want any trouble, but we still believed something needed to be done.

Three of us were then delegated to take part in a more serious sit-in, which would involve staying after we were refused service. Our sit-in group included myself, a black student from Africa, and an African-American student. After we sat down, no one in the drugstore talked to us. We were not offered service, although we were not bothered during the sit-in, either. The drugstore's employees simply ignored us, and I don't remember any other soda fountain customers staying during the time we were there. Two of us (the African student and I) stayed for more than three hours.

During the time we were sitting in, very few people came into the drugstore, and those who did didn't stay. I think now that customers were being kept away, or possibly they thought it prudent not to be in area. We were hoping to gain some publicity for our cause, but no reporters or photographers showed up.

Late in the afternoon, a very polite Stillwater policeman came in, apparently after being called, and talked to us. I told him why we were there, saying that I thought Negro students should be able to have a coke at the drugstore. I said that if Negroes could fight and die in Korea, they should be able to have a coke in Campus Drug. He didn't exactly order us to go, but said we had made our statement, suggesting that it was time to leave.

We decided that staying longer wouldn't accomplish much, and we soon left. As we were leaving, a man from the business next door said that the owners would never serve Negroes and would close their doors before that happened. I think it was about two years later that they did close. However, other businesses in Stillwater were beginning to serve blacks.

After the second sit-in, which we felt had not accomplished our goal, I suggested that the committee talk to OSU president Oliver Willham about segregation in Stillwater businesses. None of the black

students wanted to go, so I volunteered to talk to him. Dr. Willham listened to me and was very respectful, but he said that such things take time, that OSU was a very conservative campus and had to be responsive to the larger community, but that desegregation in Stillwater businesses would happen in the not-too-distant future. He agreed that segregation wasn't right. At our next meeting, I reported Dr. Willham's remarks and the others seemed to be satisfied with what he had said.

Our committee feared that, because of the sit-ins, we would be barred from meeting on campus, but there was no retaliation from the university – although there was no encouragement either. The sit-ins were never reported in the newspapers, and I don't know if there was any kind of police report about the incident.

The Human Relations Group had been meeting for about two years, but we didn't get together for a third year. Some of the group felt that desegregation was happening anyway, and anything we did would be at our personal expense. We wanted an education, and the issue was being addressed by the powers that be. The black students, in particular, seemed to feel that way.

To my knowledge, though, we held the first sit-in by college students in Oklahoma, although it was never reported in the newspapers or on television.



## **Heather MacAlpine Lloyd\***

by

**Ann Fuhrman**

It saddens me to report that Heather MacAlpine Lloyd, 59, passed away peacefully in her sleep Monday, February 19, 2001. A memorial service was held at the Bennett Memorial Chapel on the campus of Oklahoma State University on Saturday, February 24.

Heather was born in Reading, Pennsylvania, on November 25, 1941 to David and Sara Fister MacAlpine. She moved with her family to Stillwater in 1947 and graduated from Stillwater High School in 1959. Heather earned a bachelor's degree in secondary education and Spanish from the University of Kansas in 1963. Heather earned a MLS at the University of California at Los Angeles in 1964. She worked in southern California until 1967 before returning to Stillwater.

A temporary position in the Edmon Low Library at Oklahoma State University turned into a 33-year career. Heather was hired in 1968 as an instructor and was quickly promoted to assistant professor. Heather was to become an associate professor and department head. Her first assignment included supervising one librarian, two staff, and several student assistants. She was in charge of interlibrary loan, non-book room, exhibits, special collections, loose maps, microform materials and general reference assistance.

In 1987, Heather received a new task: She was asked to create the Special Collections/University Archives Department. There were no

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\*Heather Lloyd was an active member of the Payne County Historical Society. At the time of her death she was on the Board of Directors as past president.

policies or procedures or formal preservation guidelines for any of the Library's special collections, but it was the type of challenge on which Heather thrived. She provided the greatly needed cohesiveness for the new department and pulled together various collections, including a large collection made up of university material. Heather, who received a master's in history from OSU in 1976, proved to be an invaluable resource for the authors writing the OSU Centennial Histories Series. Her knowledge of the university's past, including where to locate information, photographs and artifacts, was legendary. Although Heather had processed numerous special collections over the years, her favorite one was that of Dr. Angie Debo, an historian of national prominence and also one-time curator of maps for the OSU Library. Upon Heather's retirement, she said, "When you work with people's personal papers you feel you know a person and you develop an affinity with their work. Although Miss Angie retired in 1955, I spoke with her regularly over the years. She was a smart and funny woman."

The same can be said of Heather. "I do believe my energy gives out when I leave the office," she wrote on one of her personnel files in the section asking for extracurricular activities. However, Heather found time to participate in the following organizations: Oklahoma Library Association, American Library Association, Southwest Library Association, Society of Southwest Archivists, Higher Education Alumni Council of Oklahoma, Payne County Historical Society, Oklahoma Historical Society, OSU Museum Advisory Council, and Old Central Committee.

Heather retired in May, 2000 after a 33-year career as Associate Professor and Head of Special Collections and University Archives at the Edmon Low Library of Oklahoma State University.

She is survived by her husband John, of Stillwater, her sister Mary Cahoon, of Calgary, Canada, and brothers David, of Spring, TX, Ian, of Oakdale, MN, and Gordon MacAlpine, of San Antonio, TX, and numerous nieces and nephews. Heather loved the outdoors and it was her desire that her ashes be spread at a favorite spot in the Rocky Mountains.

Memorials can still be made to the OSU Foundation, P.O. Box 1749, Stillwater, OK 74076-1749 for the David MacAlpine Scholarship or to the Judith Karman Hospice Inc., P.O. Box 818, Stillwater, OK 74074.

## Payne County Historical Society

The Payne County Historical Society is organized in order to bring together people interested in history, especially the history of Payne County, Oklahoma. The Society's major function is to discover and collect any materials that may help to establish or illustrate the history of the area.

Membership in the Payne County Historical Society is open to anyone interested in the collection and preservation of Payne County history. All members receive copies of the *Payne County Historical Review* free. In addition, the Society sponsors informative meetings and historical outings several times a year.

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Yes, I want to be a member of the Payne County Historical Society. Enclosed is my check for:

- \$12.00 for Individual Membership
- \$17.00 for Family Membership
- \$20.00 for Institutional Membership
- \$100.00 for Life Membership

(Membership includes subscription to the *Payne County Historical Review*.)

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ADELIA HANSON I 01  
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