

BALBOA ISLAND LIVING

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A SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO **Tom Crosson Jr.**



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history

By **Pete Weitzner** – Balboa Island Resident and Co-Producer, “The Golden Age of Newport Harbor”



FROM NEWPORT HARBOR TO PEARL HARBOR VETS GO BACK ON 80th ANNIVERSARY

Marine Corps Veteran Dwight Hanson was stationed at MCAS El Toro, served 1987-1993, including Desert Storm. His father served in the Navy in World War II. Hanson had a lifelong passion for veterans, especially WWII. And he was able to help send **Bill Stewart** of Balboa Island, and seven other California WWII vets on a five-day trip, part of the **80th National Pearl Harbor Remembrance**.

Stewart, 92, one of the youngest living American WWII vets – he enlisted September 1946 at 17 – had met Hanson through the **Freedom Committee of Orange County (FCOC)**. It arranges for vets like Stewart to visit local high schools, “tell them what service was like,” Stewart said.

“Incredible trip,” Stewart said of the Pearl Harbor visit, “and every day he’d (Hanson) call me, ‘I got the flight covered, I got this covered...’”

Hanson secured underwriting from the **Stanley W. Eckstrom Foundation in Orange**, and the **Community Foundation of Orange**, to cover all expenses for the WW II vets.

Each vet received their own personal guardian. Stewart was **Senior Chief Gary Tegel**, a retired Naval veteran, and **Newport Harbor High School** graduate. Tegel and Hanson were co-hosts, and Hanson’s daughter, Trinity, a senior at **Mater Dei High School**, was the trip photographer.

“They were all great, they made this happen in just a few weeks.”

Stewart said the “most memorable experience, the most important, was the ceremony at the **USS Arizona Memorial**.” The remains of the battle-ship lie at the bottom of Pearl Harbor. The Arizona sustained 1,177 casualties, about half the soldiers killed in the bombings that day. 1,102 of whom remain on board today in their watery grave. Bill was especially interested in the Arizona, as he and his Boy Scout troop toured the Arizona just days before she sailed for Pearl Harbor from Long Beach on July 8, 1941 when Bill was 12.

Stewart also noted the **USS Nevada** ceremony – “There must have been with 30 bagpipes or more” – and a visit to **MCAS Kaneohe Bay** Marine helicopter station where 200 Marines had been waiting in the rain to greet the WW II heroes.

Stewart himself has spearheaded **The Veterans Project**, an effort to recognize all veterans connected to Balboa Island. There are close to 200. Names and some detail on their life and service can be found on the museum’s website. (Incidentally, the name Audie Murphy can be found on this registry. As the most decorated soldier in U.S. combat history, he kept his boat here. “We consider him one of our own,” Stewart said.)

In 2015, the nonprofit **Honor Flights** sent Bill Stewart on a three-day trip to the war memorials in Washington D.C. More recently Stewart went to the **National WWII Museum** in New Orleans, courtesy of the **Gary Sinise Foundation**. He’s since evangelized such opportunities to other local vets.



Bill Stewart (back row, center left) with his guardian, Senior Chief Gary Tegel. Mater Dei High School student Trinity Hanson (back row, at left) takes a break from photography to pose with the WWII veterans. The Arizona Memorial is in the background.



Names of the men who gave their lives on the U.S.S. Arizona



Bill Stewart enlisted in September 1946 at age 17. This photo was taken when Bill was 18 during the occupation of Japan.



Balboa Island resident Bill Stewart, 92, is one of the youngest living American WWII vets.

“This was just different, Stewart said, reflecting on the Pearl Harbor trip. It was more intimate. One guy, a fighter pilot, served in three wars,” Stewart said.

“It was important. A lot of history.”

Visit Balboa Island Museum Newport Beach – discover the stories of our veterans. Open daily. Free general admission. Become a member. balboaislandmuseum.org/become-a-member



WWII veterans in front of the Arizona Memorial Wall of Names



Co-host Dwight Hanson (at left) secured underwriting to cover all expenses for the WW II vets.