

Biography of Alvin Albert Dvorak



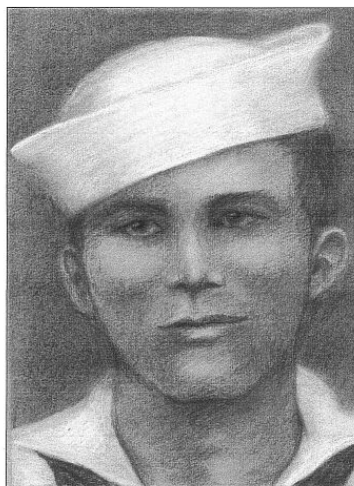
Alvin Albert Dvorak

US Navy, USS Arizona

BM2c, Service No. 328-51-60

Research done by Al Johnson, member of the Pine County Genealogical Society. Al had the opportunity to attend the 73rd Anniversary Reunion at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 2014 and again in 2016 for the 75th Anniversary.

Alvin Albert Dvorak was a Pine County sailor who lost his life in December 1941 as a result of the Pearl Harbor attack.



Alvin Albert Dvorak

Alvin Albert Dvorak, Boatswain's Mate 2c

Alvin was born on the 3rd of April 1917 in Tripp County South Dakota. On January 13th the following year, his mother, Emma (Mach) Dvorak succumbed to Spanish flu. Four days later his father, Joseph, died from the dreaded disease. Alvin moved to Minnesota to live with his Aunt Mary (Mach) and Uncle Joseph Kvasnicka. In 1930, Alvin was living with his Grandmother and Grandfather, John and Barbara Mach on a farm still owned by the Kvasnicka family. Alvin made the front page of the Askov American newspaper with his fellow classmates in May 1931. He was one of three students with perfect attendance in the six student Pleasant Hill School near Kerrick. Four of his five classmates were also his first cousins. The newspaper photograph is the only know photograph of Alvin. It is unknown how long Alvin stayed with his grandparents, but, in 1937 he was living in Stillwater and working as a farm hand when he applied to join the Navy on 12 November 1937 in Minneapolis, MN where his guardian, Casper Heaser (brother-in-law) signed for him. He was accepted and inducted into the Navy on 2 March 1938, in Minneapolis. At the time, he was 5'8¼" tall and weighed 162 pounds and had brown hair and blue eyes. He reported on board the USS Arizona on July 9, 1938. Alvin progressed in rank from Seaman 2nd class, to Coxswain, to Boatswain Mate 3rd Class and finally to Boatswain Mate 2nd Class prior to December 7th.

On December 7th, 1941, the USS Arizona was moored on the inboard (shore) side while the USS Vestal, a repair ship, was tied up outboard of them. Therefore, the Arizona could not be damaged by torpedoes and therefore had to be bombed from above. At about 8:06 an armor piercing bomb was released from a Japanese plane at about 10,000 feet. About a minute later the bomb pierced the deck of the Arizona between the two forward 16" guns and exploded in the forward ammunition magazine. The explosion lifted parts of the 32,000 ton ship thirty feet in the air. The ship was fully loaded with 1.3 million gallons of heavy oil for firing the ship big boilers, as it was to leave port the next morning. The oil burned for two and a half days and there were still 0.5 million gallons left to slowly leak out of the ship, called the "tears of the sailors". The attack started about 07:52 and shortly after there were six men at their battle stations on the Port Side A/A (Anti-Aircraft) Director, which is about 40 feet above the main deck. They were: Fred Lomax, officer in charge, Lauren Bruner, Alvin Dvorak, Fred "Zeke" Zimmerman, Don Stratton, and Russell Lott. Zeke, a North Dakota native, was standing at the entrance hatch when the explosion threw him across the room hitting the bulkhead and was immediately killed. Ensign Lomax had gone below to see why they weren't getting ammunition and was never seen again. Earl Reiner from the Starboard A/A Director joined them as did Harold Kuhn, a big gun lookout. So six men were stranded in the Port A/A Director and the ship was burning below them blocking their escape. Although they were 40 feet above the main deck, they were also thirty feet or more from the edge of the ship. Listening to screams, they witnessed others unsuccessfully trying to leap that distance to safety from other elevated areas. It's hard to imagine their thoughts and feelings as they saw their fellow shipmates below them on the main deck with their clothing burnt off, their skin charred, and looking like zombies.

Of the six, only Kuhn didn't have any wounds, but all the rest had significant wounds. Don Stratton was burned over 50% of his body; Lauren Bruner was burned over 74% of his body and some shrapnel wounds and he spent seven months recovering in the hospital. Alvin Dvorak was burnt over 82% of his body. The story of how they survived is a testament to their courage and mental strength.

Alvin Dvorak, among artillery noise, explosions and heavy smoke, was able to get the attention of Joseph George on board the USS Vestal. Joe threw a "heavie", small rope with a weighted monkey fist on the end, which allowed for a long accurate throw. Then a 1 ½" rope was snaked over to the Port A/A Director from the Vestal and tied off. Lauren asked Alvin what kind of knot he was going to tie, to which Alvin replied, "Damn well not a slip knot!" To me this shows the character of the person who can make a joke while severely burned and among the great calamity around them. Kuhn was the first person to hand walk across the line sixty feet above the water in order to test the line. The water 60 feet below the line was on fire from the oil burning on the surface. Below them were dead sailors and others who abandoned ship who were struggling to stay afloat by splashing the heavy oil away from them. There weren't many who were successful. The second to leave was Don Stratton, who had his last skin graft due to the burns in 1991, fifty years after Pearl Harbor! As Lauren was about to get on the line he saw Joseph George arguing with someone and had picked up a fire axe. Joseph yelled, "Hurry up I can't hold the ship much longer". Alvin insisted Lauren go ahead of him as he wanted to make sure his knot held and he was the most severely injured. Lauren Bruner had severe burns on his hands, yet he was able to hand over hand walk across the line. He was struggling the last fifteen feet, so much so that he had to put his feet up over the rope to help him make it to the USS Vestal. For months in the hospital, they would soak his hands in brine and then peel off the dead skin and bathe them in alcohol. What pain and

perseverance!

The argument Joseph George was having on the Vestal was over an order he was given to cut the line bringing the survivors over to the Vestal. The order was placed because the Vestal was untied from the mooring and drifting away from the Arizona. Thankfully, he refused the order. The survivors felt the refusal to cut the line is the only reason he didn't get the Congressional Medal of Honor. On 7 December 2017, Rear Admiral Matthew Carter, deputy commander of the US Pacific Fleet, presented the Bronze Star with "V" Device for Valor for Chief Boatswain's Mate Joseph "Joe" Leon George to George's daughter Joe Ann Taylor, aboard the USS Arizona Memorial.

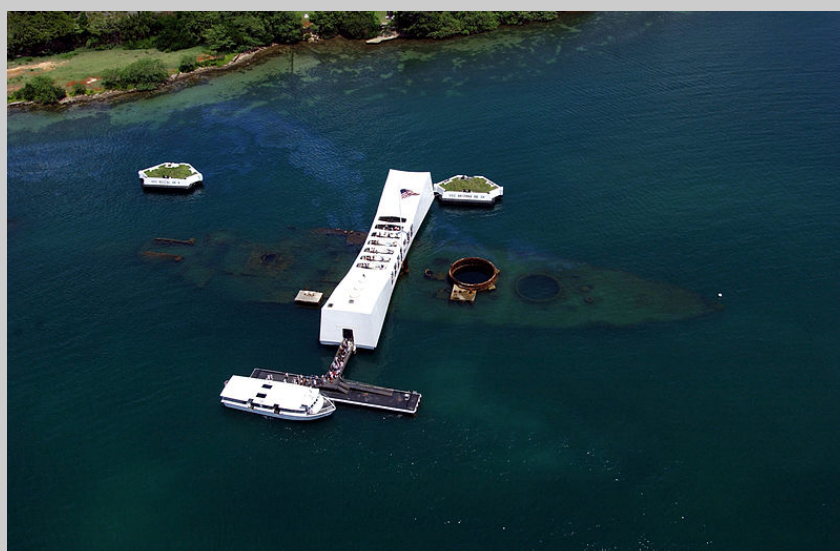
Alvin Dvorak was transferred to the hospital ship, USS Solace, and then to the USSAT Collidge for transfer to the Mare Island Naval Hospital in San Francisco Bay. Unfortunately, he passed away on Christmas Eve Day the day before the ship reached port. His body was sent to Minnesota where it was claimed by his brother-in-law, Casper Heaser. Alvin was laid to rest in the Fort Snelling National Cemetery in Minneapolis on New Year's Day.



USS Arizona



December 7, 1941 Pearl Harbor Attack



USS Arizona memorial aerial view



USS Arizona Memorial Pearl Harbor

View Alvin Albert Dvorak's memorial on [Findagrave](#).