

'Run to the Guns' Pearl Harbor Day Remembrance Ride

December 7... a date to always remember and to honor the many lives cut short and the others changed forever.

For many years there have been efforts to build a WWII Memorial at Arizona's Capitol in Phoenix. The 2013 Pearl Harbor Day commemoration, held on Saturday December 7, would see the dedication of that WWII Memorial.

The project itself, once approved, took three years to complete. Through the efforts of AZ's Secretary of State Ken Bennett, Arizona was able to acquire from the US Navy the only remaining 14-inch Big Deck Gun off the USS Arizona. It had been in storage in a New Jersey shipyard. He also secured a 16-inch Deck Gun off the "Mighty Mo".

Motorcyclists organized a tribute parade to pay respect to this important landmark in Arizona history ~ both the historic ties to the tragedy at Pearl Harbor and the overdue tribute to our few remaining WWII Veterans.

Sign-in for the Run to the Guns ~ Pearl Harbor Day Remembrance Ride took place at EagleRider Motorcycle Sales, at 1000 N McClintock Dr in Tempe. This was a fully escorted ride, structured with military precision. Kick Stands Up was at 7:48am, the time that the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor commenced.

According to organizer Jim "Boomer" Bourassa, participants represented the American Legion Riders, VFW, a list of some 30 other MCs and RCs, plus independent riders. Boomer led the procession with Ken Bennett as his wing-man. They were followed by 1,916 bikes; as reported by the DPS escort. He shared some interesting coincidences pertaining to that number, which caused him goose bumps. 1916 was the year that the USS Arizona was first launched. He had invited the priest from the Trinity Cathedral in Phoenix to offer the ride a Prayer at



the Road Captains meeting. The priest shared that his same church christened the USS Arizona back in 1916.

Upon arrival at Wesley Bolin Plaza at the Arizona State Capitol in Phoenix the parade rolled past the Memorial itself. The Saluting Marine ~ SSgt Tim Chambers was also in attendance; presenting his Salute to honor the Veterans, their Families, and his fellow Patriots.

Many Arizonans participated in this dedication. It is estimated that some 25,000 were in attendance. Boomer noted that based upon so many people coming out, that they had just enough room to park all the bikes. More bikes may have been a problem for parking.

The ceremonial activities included an opening prayer, the National Anthem, a release of doves, a B-17 'Flying Fortress' flyover, and a lot of speakers. Three dozen roses were laid atop the guns, plus wreath layers from 87 different organizations made their presentations.

There was a dedication to the Filthy 13. Boomer described these men at the GI Joes of their time; predecessors to the Navy SEALs. He wanted to remind

everyone that WW2 was about more than just Pearl Harbor. That was just the beginning of the US involvement. From there, four hard-fought years ensued.

A lot of planning and imagery went into the WW2 Memorial... With the two deck guns serving as 'bookends', the design of AZ's WWII Memorial reflects the beginning of the US involvement in WW2 when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and sank the USS Arizona and the end of WW2 when Japan surrendered on the deck of the USS Missouri. The nine I-beams of the Memorial, which hold the names of the sailors, depict the keel of the ship and commemorate the 9 minutes it took for the USS Arizona to

sink. Wesley Bolin Plaza was already home to the USS Arizona's Signal Mast and Anchor; and these artifacts blend well with the new Memorial.

A brick program provides people with an opportunity to help support this Memorial and its upkeep. For a donation of \$125, a brick can be inscribed with a message, such as the name of your family's WW2 Veteran[s], and it will be placed within the Memorial's grounds.

There is much more than space allows here that can be said about this Memorial. When you go to visit the site, be sure and stop in at the WW2 Museum, under the Capitol Dome. There you can get an informational pamphlet that describes the Memorial in great detail.

Thank you to Jim "Boomer" Bourassa of American Legion Post 138 for his dedication to this project and for his help with this article.

Betsy

Photo by Scott Cancelosi,
Arizona Secretary of State's Office

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