

USS Arizona



Memorial evokes emotion, remembrance for visitors

PH2 Duane Russell Image

USS Arizona Memorial stands as a reminder of the sacrifices made by those who fought in the Pacific during World War II.

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The memorial over USS Arizona serves as a reminder of Dec. 7, 1941, the day "which will live in infamy..." It spans the midsection of the sunken battleship, seeming to sag in the middle and rise on both ends. The memorial, completed in 1962, bears mute, but powerful, witness to the tragedies and triumphs of the war in the Pacific.

The peak on the entry section represents America's strength just before the attack. The sag in the middle represents the low point when America was defeated at Pearl Harbor and the rise at the other end symbolizes the even-

one of sadness. Rather, the memorial pays homage to those who fought bravely during World War II as well as those who died during the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. Kathy Billings, Superintendent for the USS Arizona Memorial, says it is meant to open people's eyes to what it was like then so they can, hopefully, prevent something like that from happening in the future.

"The film before the trip out to the memorial gives mostly facts and figures about the attack," said Billings. "The intent (of the memorial) is to allow each person who visits to experience his own emotional response. That way, the visit becomes a more personal event."



JO2 Jim Williams photo

More than a million visitors pay their respects to the memory of the Sailors and Marines lost... but only a handful of visitors can call them their shipmates.

"People generally come away feeling much more patriotic."

Kathy Billings
Superintendent for the USS Arizona Memorial



PH2 Chad McNealey photo

The central gathering room offers views both fore and aft of the sunken hull of the Arizona. The openings above and to the sides represent an eternal 21-gun salute.

tual victory and return to power at the end of the war. Guests enter through the visitor's center and can see museum displays of memorabilia from the ship. Prior to the trip to the Arizona Memorial, a park ranger, or a Pearl Harbor survivor, give visitors a brief talk and then lead them to a small theatre to watch a documentary outlining the events of Dec. 7.

After the documentary, Sailors aboard a Navy boat take visitors to the memorial. There, they can see the entry room, with flags from the states of the ships lost during the attack. They can then go into the main viewing area. Seven openings on the left and right sides of the memorial and ceiling represent a perpetual 21-gun salute. Also in the main area is a viewing well where visitors can look down and get a better look of the remains of the warship.

Beyond the main area is the shrine room where the names of the Sailors and Marines killed in 1941 are inscribed on huge marble slabs. Additionally, the names of those who survived the attack and later chose to be interred with their former shipmates are inscribed on a special plaque.

The overall feeling is not meant to be

Billings said a visit to the memorial sometimes helps open up a dialogue between those who were actually present during the attack and their families. Survivors find they want to talk about what it was like to serve aboard ships or around Pearl Harbor on that day and throughout the war so their family is able to better understand some of the pain they may have been feeling since then. Other survivors marvel at how young the drivers of the boats are that take them back out to the site where Arizona rests at the bottom of the harbor.

"The faces are so young," said Billings. "It really brings home to some people that those men on the ship never had a chance at a full life."

For visitors who did not serve during the war, the memorial can be the impetus that piques their curiosity about what went on during the war or renews their belief in America.

"People generally come away feeling much more patriotic," Billings said. "They go to the book store and buy flags and there is a great interest in learning more about what occurred that day and why it occurred." She said the search for knowledge might also be what people need to begin the search for peace.



U.S. Navy Photo

Seen in its prime, USS Arizona (BB 39) was a powerful asset to the U.S. Navy.



PH2 Darin Russell photo

The memorial symbolizes America's strength before the war, its initial defeat and then its eventual victory and return to prominence.