

My Memories of December 7th 1941

(An Excerpt from my book Gibbon's Secrets)

R.G. Bud Phelps

December 7th, 1941

One of Gibbon's favorite sons, Dale Pitke, had returned home from the Navy to spend Christmas leave with his folks, George and Cecil Pitke.

The Pitke's had invited Bud's folks, Reg and Addie, and his sister Jean for Sunday dinner after church. Cecil said, "I wanted to share this special treat of having Dale home on leave from the Navy with our dearest friends."

Dale quickly responded, "I am glad that you invited the Phelps' over for Sunday dinner Mom. You are such a blessing to me and being home with you is really something special, I'm glad we can share this time with them. Dad, would you say Grace before our meal?"

George said, "It is with pleasure today that I thank thee Lord for the joy of spending this Sunday with our son Dale and our special friends the Phelps'. Lord, we ask thee to continue protecting our loved ones and to bless this food that is set before us. In Jesus name we pray – Amen."

Bud was so proud that he got to sit next to Dale – and could learn all about ship-board duty. "Dale – what is it like being stationed on USS Arizona?"

Dale smiled and said, "Well Bud – it's pretty exciting – the Arizona crew's total compliment is more than the total population of Gibbon, and she does have many of the same conveniences you would find in any small town."

Bud could not even imagine a ship that would hold that many people and have stores – places to eat – places to sleep – and even a hospital. "Do they even have movies aboard ship?"

"Yes, they do, and we get to see all of the latest releases."

"Wow! You probably see movies before we do in Gibbon."

"I'm sure that sometimes we do. Did you see 'Aloma of the South Seas', starring Dorothy Lamour?"

"Yes I did, I took Marilyn Kirk to that movie on a Saturday, and Dad gave me a quarter to take her and since the tickets were nine cents each, I had enough left over to buy a bag of popcorn to share with her!"

Dale laughed and said, "You are one big spender Bud – it's amazing that you could do so much with a quarter."

The radio was on low with a pleasant sound of music in the background when the song was interrupted with a news flash – *"Japan has delivered simultaneous bombing attacks on Pearl Harbor, the Philippines, Wake Island, and Guam. Japanese forces have invaded Malaya and Thailand, seizing Shanghai, and have declared war on the United States and Great Britain."*

Everyone was in shock – Dale immediately contacted the Naval Headquarters in California and was ordered to return as soon as possible.

Bud, close to tears, said to Dale, “I want you to know that you are my hero and I will think of you every day. When I’m old enough I’m going to join the Navy too!”

“Thanks Bud and I’d like you to do me a favor while I’m gone. I want you to be my pen-pal and keep me posted on what’s happening here at home. Will you do that?”

“You bet! I promise to write you every week and I’ll ask my buddies to add their little notes, too.”

Addie was already comforting Cecil and said, “Oh Cecil, we will get through this thing together and I’ll be saying special prayers for Dale’s safety.”

Reg and Addie sensed that Cecil and George deserved some time alone with Dale so Reg said, “We know you need some private time with Dale so we’ll just slip on home and if we can do anything at all for you please let us know.”

George said, “Thanks Reg – we really would like to spend this little time we have with Dale now, and I know we will definitely need your caring prayers for all of us. Your family has always been very important to us.”

Reg and Addie and the kids went home with heavy hearts wondering what was in store for Dale and for our country now that the war they were so worried about had so violently erupted on Pearl Harbor.

The boys all met in Mr. Ross's barn late in the afternoon of December 7th and banded together to pledge a patriotic bond supporting the United States until World War II ends in victory. They also made a solemn promise to write their new Navy hero, Dale Pitke.

The haymow of Mr. Ross's barn was a special place for the boys and with this sad news of Pearl Harbor on their young minds they felt the need to feel safe in a familiar place.

Bud said, "Guys, it is our duty to do whatever we can even as kids, to help keep up the morale here in Gibbon."

They all agreed and Duncan added, "Bud's right, even though we're just kids we can do a lot to help out."

Donny, the timid one, said, "I'm scared!"

The boys all pulled close to Donny, doing their best to act brave, hoping they could make him feel safer. Soon after that the boys left the barn and headed for their homes.

On December 8th – President Franklin Delano Roosevelt announced to the nation by radio that the United States had declared war on Japan. Several days following our declaration of war against Japan – Germany declared war on the United States.

These events were shocks felt by the entire country and you could quickly see this small town of Gibbon showing their own effects of these shocks and many of its young men quickly heading to the recruitment centers in Kearney and Grand Island.

This short story is an excerpt from my book *Gibbon's Secrets* and is my personal memory of December 7th 1941. Both of my historical fiction books (*Gibbon's Secrets & Back in the Day*) also have delightful Christmas stories in them, therefore would make great gifts. You can order the books on my website, <http://www.budsbooks.com> and I'll even sign the copies for you.