

Ruff

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vada had to run for the open ocean or suffer the fate of the Arizona. The departure was perfectly timed between the Japanese first and second strike waves of planes. Ruff and his fellow officers began the difficult maneuvers involved in getting the 29,000-ton battleship out of Pearl Harbor unassisted by tug boats. As Nevada headed into the South Channel, Ruff and the other sailors had to be in shock as they viewed the destruction of Battleship Row.

The Nevada cleared the end of Battleship Row just before 9 a.m. The second wave of Japanese planes began to arrive in force. There was only one large ship in the harbor maneuvering and the Japanese started an intensive attacks on the Nevada. The Japanese knew if they could sink the Nevada in the main shipping channel, Pearl Harbor would be closed for months. The Nevada's gun crews threw up the defensive barrage, but the Japanese dive bombers scored numerous hits and near-misses. Casualties mounted on the Nevada. The Nevada was hit by 5 large bombs and had 11 fires burning out of control. The officers, including Ruff, decided the best course of action was to ground the Nevada at Hospital Point so that she would not be sunk in the channel.

Historians credit Ruff's actions in shortening the Pacific war by keeping clear the Pearl Harbor shipping channel and preserving the Hawaiian fuel storage reserves which served the Pacific. The Japanese second attack wave was to focus on any remaining ships in the harbor and the fuel storage reserves. The action of Ruff and his fellow crew members created a target of the Nevada and it distracted the Japanese from focusing on the fuel storage. It is estimated that it would have cost the Americans a year to rebuild the fuel storage. The actions of Ruff and the crew of the USS Nevada changed the

course of the war.

Ruff was active in many of the major campaigns in the Pacific and commanded the destroyer USS Dyson earning Bronze, Gold and Silver Stars.

Ruff also commanded the USS Menard during "history's greatest mass civilian evacuation" transporting thousands of Vietnamese refugees from Haiphong to Saigon during Operation Passage to Freedom in 1954 after the defeat of the French. The Menard served as a "guinea pig" during the first trip with refugees. There were 1,802 refugees on board and they were not happy with the Navy food. The refugees did not like how the rice was prepared. A Redemptorist priest helped solve the problem with the crew of the Menard by having 5 refugees cook the rice.

Lawrence E. Ruff married Agnes Eula Shay (20 Apr 1906 – 24 Jan 1953) of Vallejo, California. She died due to complications during surgery. On 4 November 1954, Ruff married Anna E. Davies (6 Apr 1906 – 18 Mar 1992). He finished a 35 year career with the US Navy moving up the ranks from a seaman to a Rear Admiral by 1958. His children are Lawrence Ernest Ruff, Jr.; William Terrence Ruff and stepdaughter: Mrs. William E. Winston II (Nancy Conover). In his retirement from the service, he did graduate work at USC. He was a college professor and taught in Long Beach city schools for 9 years. Ruff was a member of various military fraternal groups. He was also active in the community of Long Beach, California, where he lobbied for zoning and better shoreline development.

Saratoga has been defined by the people who by choice or by chance make up this community. There are many individuals like Lawrence Ruff that help define this country, our region, and this community. It is the determination of our forefathers, in surmounting overwhelming odds that help explain the American spirit – the will and ability to shape a better future.



Jim Richmond, founder of the Saratoga County History Roundtable and member of the Gristmill editorial team, was presented with the Hugh Hastings Award by the Association of Public Historians of New York State at their annual convention in September. The Hastings Award is given to a non-member of the Association who works to promote, preserve and stimulate interest in the history of New York State. The award was presented by Devin Lander, the New York State Historian.