

Tucsonan entombed in USS Arizona

By Douglas Kreutz
The Arizona Daily Star

James Van Horn was a lanky, athletic, freckle-faced teen-ager finishing up his sophomore year at Tucson High School in the spring of 1941.

He liked riding his bicycle, loved playing basketball and, so far as his relatives can recall, hadn't given more than a passing thought to military service.

Then, one day near the end of the school term, Van Horn heard a recruiting talk by a Navy officer named Adm. Isaac Kidd.

Kidd's words inspired the young man and moved him to action. He quit school at the end of his sophomore year and enlisted in the Navy on June 5, 1941.

Six months and two days later, 17-year-old Apprentice Seaman James Van Horn went down with the battleship USS Arizona during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

He was the sole Tucsonan to be entombed in the sunken ship, which is the final resting place for more than 900 sailors and Marines. Among the men sharing the watery grave is Kidd, who was on the Arizona at the time of the attack.

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Van Horn's younger brother, Dudley Van Horn of Yuma, remembers James as a good-looking, outgoing lad who had lots of friends at Tucson High School.

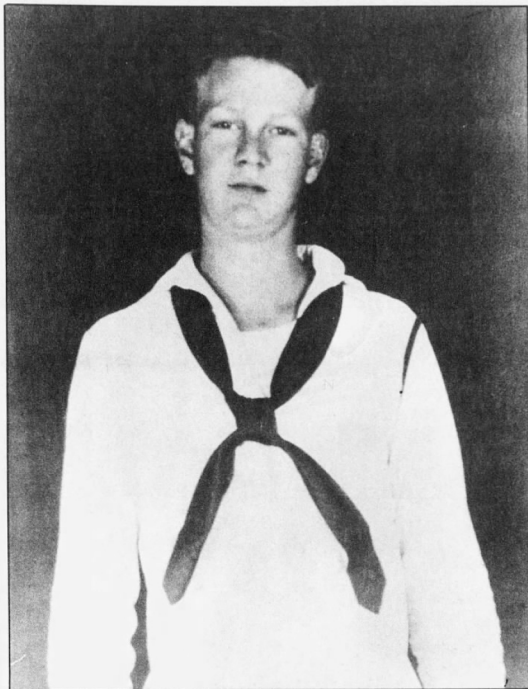
"He was born in 1924 in Olkmugee, Oklahoma, but we grew up in Dallas, Texas, and Tucson," says Van Horn, 65. "We came to Tucson in 1936. James went to Roskrige Junior High before going to Tucson High.

"He loved basketball and bike riding and any kind of sports," Van Horn says. "And he was a good student. . . . But then he was recruited by Admiral Kidd."

Van Horn says the idea of military service seemed to give direction to his brother's life.

"He was very excited about going into the Navy," he recalls. "He seemed to want to make a career of it. . . . I last saw him in the spring of 1941 before he went in. We just kind of said goodbye. We didn't believe then that there would be a world war.

"He went to basic training in San Diego,"



James Van Horn quit Tucson High School to join the Navy

Van Horn says. "He completed that in August, but he didn't get a furlough. He went straight to the Arizona."

Van Horn says members of his family received letters and postcards from the

young seaman after the USS Arizona arrived in Hawaii.

His mother, Bonnie Cope, who died in 1975, said in a 1958 interview with an Arizona Daily Star reporter that the last

letter she received from her son was on Nov. 26, 1941.

"He said he was going to send me some new pictures, and that he was getting ready to send home Christmas gifts," Cope told the reporter. "But of course he didn't. The attack happened before he had a chance to."

Van Horn says surviving family members, including another brother and a sister, Ted Van Horn and Billie Hildebrand of Yuma, know little about the final hours of James' life.

"We have learned that at the time of the attack, he had KP duty in the ship's kitchen," he says.

He says family members received no official word on the fate of their loved one until weeks after the attack.

"We were notified in late December of 1941 that he was missing in action," Van Horn recalls. "We got a follow-up telegram in (February) 1942 saying that he was killed in action."

Van Horn, who joined the Army in 1943 and served in the United States, says he visited the USS Arizona Memorial in 1987.

"It was pretty gruesome," he says of the experience. "It's hard to explain the feeling of being there. . . . He was my brother."

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According to military records and research by historians, eight other Arizonans are entombed on the USS Arizona:

- Seaman 2nd Class George Allen Bertle Jr. of Phoenix.
- Pharmacist 2nd Class Ivan Lee Block of St. Johns.
- Seaman 1st Class Louis Edward Cremeens of Yuma.
- Chief Gunner's Mate James Williams Horrocks of Nogales.
- Coxswain George Sanford Hollowell of Phoenix.
- Seaman 1st Class James Joseph Murphy of Bisbee.
- Seaman 2nd Class Harvey Leroy Skeen of Miami.
- Fireman 1st Class Roy Eugene Wood of Yuma.