

Musings on Lieutenant Gerald Anthony Hanggi, Sr.

Part I – Gun Barrels from the USS Arizona and USS Missouri

Launched from the New York Naval Shipyard and commissioned on June 3, 1920, USS Tennessee (BB-43), the lead ship of her class of battleship, was the third ship of the United States Navy named in honor of the 16th US state. During World War II in the Pacific Theater, she was damaged during the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 but was repaired and modernized. She went on to participate in shore bombardments at the Aleutian Islands, Tarawa, the Marshall Islands, the Marianas, the Philippines, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and others. She was also involved in the Battle of Surigao Strait, the final battleship vs. battleship conflict ever. After the end of World War II and active service, the Tennessee was decommissioned on February 14, 1947, and was placed on reserve in the "mothball fleet" for nearly fifteen years before finally being "struck" and sold for scrap on July 10, 1959. During her years of active service the Tennessee won ten battle stars as well as numerous citations, commendations and other commemorative medals.

On the morning of December 7, 1941, the Tennessee was moored starboard side to a pair of masonry "mooring quays" on Battleship Row, the name given to a line of deep water berths located along the southeast side of Ford Island, Pearl Harbor. During the Japanese attack, the crewmen of the Tennessee including Gerald Anthony Hanggi, Sr. manned her antiaircraft guns, and they attempted to defend the harbor and their warship as well as they could. During the air raid, the Tennessee was struck by two armor-piercing bombs that detonated incompletely. The first one hit the center gun of turret two, and it made all three guns inoperable. The second bomb went through the roof of turret three, and it damaged her left gun. The Tennessee was showered with debris when the magazine of the Arizona exploded and her stern was engulfed in flames from the Arizona's burning fuel oil.

Wedge between the sunken West Virginia and her mooring quays, the Tennessee was trapped at her berth for ten days before being freed and four days later she set sail for the US West Coast to be repaired. Casualties inflicted on the Tennessee crew during the attack included four killed, twenty-two wounded and one missing in action. It is believed that by war's end, Gerald Anthony Hanggi, Sr. had attained the rank of Chief Petty Officer.

Gerald Anthony "Gerry" Hanggi, Sr.¹ was a US Navy petty officer during the Second World War and served on a "landing ship tank" (LST) in numerous Pacific island landings and conflicts as well as the battleship USS Tennessee. He used to joke about being hungry all of his life while growing up during the Great Depression and of having his first full meal and appetite quenched, after joining the navy.

As a high school student in about 1996-97, my son Michael was required to interview someone who was present at a historically significant event. Gerry Hanggi agreed to this interview

¹ Gerald Anthony Hanggi, Sr. was appointed Patrolman on July 6, 1948; was promoted to Detective on August 10, 1957; was injured in the Line-of Duty on May 24, 1966; was promoted to Lieutenant on January 11, 1973; and retired for pension on February 16, 1990.

regarding the Japanese air raid on Pearl Harbor, where he served on the USS Tennessee during the attack and after. As he spoke, he transported us back through time to the deck of the battleship as he and other sailors manned the deck guns shooting at their attackers. For a brief period he took us to this place and time. His ship took damage and many were killed or wounded, including the lad next to him on one of the big guns. "I looked away from him, turned back and his head was gone." After the last wave of planes and mini subs departed, everyone in Pearl Harbor knew there would be another attack in hours and they tried to prepare for the next air attack or potential beach landings by the Japanese. "We went ashore to get rifles and/or hand guns to repel the forthcoming land battle on the main island of Oahu. A number of us went to the military armory to arm-up, but were turned down over an issue of authorization." Hanggi was not very fond of the armory staff.

On the damaged battleship sailors made preliminary repairs on the Tennessee, to make it as seaworthy as possible and to prepare it for the imminent threat of further sea battles to take place. They commandeered guns and other parts from ships that were damaged beyond repair and when able, set out to sea. A short time later they headed for the Puget Sound Navy Yard in Bremerton, Washington for refitting, modifications, and permanent repairs. As the land-based repair crews audited the parts of the Tennessee they found that the serial numbers from some of the big guns were from other ships. Several of the Tennessee's guns had been rendered inoperable during the air raid and had been replaced by scavenged units and/or parts. Immediately, the desk commanders started a formal inquiry in preparation for courts martial for those sailors involved in the "theft and unauthorized use of US Navy property." According to Hanggi, this was ridiculous; first the refusal to arm the men at Pearl Harbor, and now to prosecute those same brave souls who did the best they could do, with what little that was available to them.

Gerald Hanggi also said that the US Navy uniform at the time included the wearing of "shorts" in tropical assignments. So many men sustained burns to their legs at Pearl Harbor that after the attack "long pants" were the uniform-of-the-day and never again short pants could be worn. I found that tidbit interesting while considering our police clothing contract specifications over the years.

Part II – State of Minnesota v. John Musta

Defendant, John Musta, and three accomplices at approximately midnight of May 23, 1966, perpetrated a robbery of Wosika's Bar, 731 Randolph Street, St. Paul, Minnesota. Two of the men (William Schwerm and Donald Haley) were apprehended as they were about to drive away from the area where the robbery occurred. John Musta and Vernon Rollins, observing the police officers, fled the scene on foot. The police knew that the defendant's car was parked at the William Schwerm residence of 854 Burr Street in St. Paul. They stationed themselves at that location, anticipating that Musta and his companion would come there.

Defendant and Rollins did arrive at 854 Burr, a distance of approximately six miles from Wosika's Bar, on foot at about 2:30 a.m. The police officers announced their presence. They were fired upon by Musta and his companion. In an exchange of gunfire, Rollins and one of the officers, Detective Gerald Anthony Hanggi, Sr., fell wounded at the scene. Musta was hit.

Fleeing, he sought help at 752 DeSoto Street in St. Paul where he was eventually placed under arrest.

The defendant, John Musta, was found guilty by a jury of aggravated robbery and aggravated assault as charged in the indictment. An appeal from the judgment of said conviction worked its way up to the Supreme Court of Minnesota, and on August 22, 1969, the court concluded that there had been no reversible errors in the prosecution and subsequent finding of guilt. He remained in prison.

Gerald Anthony Hanggi, Sr. was also kind enough to detail the event whereby he was involved in a shooting incident resulting in the loss of the use of his legs due to nerve damage. As a police detective, Gerald Hanggi was part of a detail attempting to arrest two of the perpetrators of an armed robbery that had taken place earlier at Wosika's Bar, 731 Randolph Street in St. Paul. The arrest attempt and shooting of Detective Hanggi took place at about 2:30 a.m. on May 24, 1966, at 854 Burr Street, also in St. Paul. The detective was behind bushes next to the house when one of the suspects (John Musta) ran at him gun blazing. Upon being shot Hanggi pulled himself, dragging his legs behind him, to find his partner Sergeant Francis G. "Fran" Whitney². He had heard additional shooting and was attempting to go to his partner's assistance. Hanggi made it to the curb and used his trouser material which he twisted and curled up with his hands to form a tourniquet. He was bleeding extensively and one of his legs was "bucking" around due to nerve damage. As it turned out, Sergeant Whitney was not injured and had the second suspect (Vernon Rollins) in custody.

As the first suspect confronted and shot Hanggi, the detective returned fire with his shotgun and was sure that his assailant was dead due to the location and severity of the hits. However, the wounded Musta, shot by Hanggi and/or Whitney, escaped only to be arrested shortly thereafter at 752 DeSoto Street. He lived to serve his prison time. While incarcerated Musta vowed to kill Detective Hanggi the next time they met. Even after a claimed jailhouse spiritual conversion Gerald Hanggi never forgot that threat, stating that he carried his gun everywhere and "always, even when I take out the trash, I try to be ready for him to come at me, to kill me as he'd vowed."

After many months of recovery Gerald Hanggi returned to work wearing leg braces and using two canes for support. It should be noted that after the shooting Gerry had lost control of one of his legs, and was in constant pain with both. After a few years of treatments at the U of M Hospital in Minneapolis they sent him down to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, where they experimented with injecting medications, believed to be Novocain, directly to the damaged nerve and it worked fine... the first time. They decided to repeat the procedure with alcohol next and somehow something went wrong, rendering both legs useless, and he lived the rest of his life in constant pain. Prior to the shooting, Gerry had purchased a new set of golf clubs, as he decided to take up the sport with several others from the department. He was never able to use them, and they were a constant and painful memory of how that incident changed his life.

Although Saint Paul City Attorney Joseph P. "Joe" Summers (later to be Judge of District Court and original co-host of Twin Cities public television's "Almanac" program) argued for placing

² Francis G. Whitney was appointed Patrolman on January 4, 1954; was promoted to Sergeant on February 26, 1966; was promoted to Lieutenant on January 14, 1971; and retired for pension on January 21, 1991.

Hanggi on a disability pension, Hanggi and his police colleagues argued for his continued employment, and he remained with the department in staff and/or management positions for almost twenty-five additional years. It should be noted that Gerry was promoted to the rank of Police Lieutenant in 1973, competing with an unknown number of able-bodied and active Detectives and Sergeants. He never gave up.

One of Lieutenant Hanggi's later assignments was as commander of the police crime laboratory, wherein he and Sergeant Joseph K. "Joe" Corcoran³ started a fingerprint research project that involved putting fingerprints on items and then placing them outside in inclement weather and leaving them there for several weeks. They then recovered the items and processed them for the fingerprints. They were able to 'lift' prints and make positive identification.

At that time in the world of fingerprints it was felt that if you went to a crime scene and found items the suspect may have touched such as shards of glass, and they were lying on the ground where it had rained or snowed over them, it was felt the fingerprints would disappear and it wasn't fruitful to recover those items of evidence.

Lieutenant Hanggi's research project was able to prove that theory wrong. Gerry wrote up a paper on their findings and presented it at the annual conference of the International Association for Identification (IAI) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1972. It changed the way police evidence technicians handled crimes and the evidence left by suspects. Many of the prints left on the items in the research project were those of Joe Corcoran, as Hanggi's prints were not very good due to the medicines he was taking after his shooting incident. Joseph P. "Joe" Polski⁴ recalls that after Gerry's presentation at the Milwaukee IAI conference he was well recognized and regarded in the fingerprint community. He attended a number of IAI conferences over the years to share his knowledge... and to learn from his colleagues.

Gerry's lab findings were later presented along with a paper and presentation made by Sergeant Jerome P. "Jerry" Dolan⁵ on Saint Paul's evidence technician experience (remember when every officer in the Patrol Division attended fingerprint classes and carried his own fingerprint kit), delivered at a forensic conference in Scotland. Invited but unable to attend, Lieutenant Hanggi received the recognition he so rightfully deserved.

Gerald Anthony Hanggi, Sr. was one of the finest and bravest men that I have ever known and I was lucky to work with him and call him a friend. As Michael and I left Gerry's house I asked if

³ Joseph K. Corcoran was appointed Patrolman on March 2, 1964; was promoted to Sergeant on October 3, 1970; was promoted to Lieutenant on March 24, 1990; change in title to Commander on November 1, 1997; and retired to pension on March 27, 1998.

⁴ Joseph P. Polski was appointed Patrolman on January 16, 1967; was promoted to Sergeant on March 6, 1971; was promoted to Lieutenant on November 10, 1987; change in title to Commander on November 1, 1997; and retired to pension on December 30, 1997. Polski was a long time Executive Director of the International Association for Identification (IAI).

⁵ Jerome P. Dolan was appointed Temporary Patrolman on March 20, 1961; was appointed Patrolman on April 24, 1961; resigned to join the U.S. Secret Service on June 30, 1961; returned as Provisional Patrolman on March 30, 1964; was certified as Patrolman on November 2, 1964; was promoted to Sergeant on September 30, 1967; was promoted to Lieutenant on November 27, 1971; and died on August 10, 1993, while still employed by the police department.

the interview was worthwhile and he responded, "It was awesome." I replied, "Good, because it was on of the greatest experiences of my life!"

Thank you Gerry Hanggi.

Submitted 2014