

WW II vet Gauger dies at 91

By Victor R. Martinez
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Elmer Gauger, one of El Paso's last few Pearl Harbor survivors, died Saturday afternoon in a veterans home.



Gauger

Gauger, who was aboard the USS Pennsylvania, a 31,000-ton battleship, when Japanese fighter planes descended on the U.S. fleet at

Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941.

"He was very proud of this service to America," his widow, Charlotte Gauger, said. "He liked the military so much that after his enlistment was over in the Navy, he went back and enlisted in the Army."

Elmer Gauger was 91. The cause of his death was not given.

Funeral arrangements will be made today with a grave-site military service at Fort Bliss likely.

Gauger was an avid golfer who loved to travel and the Green Bay Packers, the Super Bowl champion this year.

"Both of them were world travelers," said Ellen Daniel, Gauger's stepdaughter. "They traveled to at least 30 to 35 countries and have been on 11 cruises. He played golf three times a week, and there's Green Bay Packer stuff through out the house."

But it was wearing that red, white and blue that made Elmer Gauger the proudest.

"To say he was a Pearl Harbor survivor was his pride and joy,"

said Judy Murgar, a nurse supervisor at Ambrosio Guillen Texas State Veterans Home in Northeast El Paso, where Gauger stayed. "Not too many veterans can say that."

Gauger grew up in Sheboygan, Wis., and came of age during the Great Depression. He joined the Navy in 1938 at age 19, eager to work to help his family.

Nearly 2,400 service members and about 50 civilians were killed in Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Another 1,200 people were injured.

"I didn't see the attack itself," Gauger told the El Paso Times in a Dec. 2010 interview.

"My station was inside the gun room of the 14-inch weapon. It was hectic. We loaded ammo all afternoon. We took a bomb hit and lost 25 men that day. After it

was over, the smell of death was in the harbor for days, probably a week."

He attended several reunions held for survivors of the attack on Pearl Harbor, both in El Paso and at the site of the attack on the Hawaiian island of Oahu, including returning to Pearl Harbor last December to commemorate the day.

The passing of Pearl Harbor veterans such as Gauger marks the end of era, Murgar said.

"It's really sad," she said. "Military life then and now is somewhat different. These men went into war when it was hand-to-hand combat. We can only imagine what they went through."

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