



Remembering

Captain Franklin Van Valkenburgh

This year will mark the 75th Anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii which abruptly brought the United States into World War II. An early casualty of the war was Captain Franklin Van Valkenburgh, Commander of the USS Arizona. He died on the bridge while directing the defense of his ship. I thought it would be appropriate to highlight his naval career, so tragically cut short.

Thanks to Dale Van Valkenburg who provided his service record from the volume of distinguished graduates at the US Naval Academy Museum.

Franklin Van Valkenburgh was born on April 5, 1888 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. At the age of 17 Franklin was appointed a midshipman at the US Naval Academy at Annapolis, MD starting in September



15, 1905. After four years of study, he graduated from the Naval Academy on June 4, 1909.

After serving on the battleships the *Vermont* and *South Carolina*, Franklin was commissioned ensign on June 5, 1911. Sailing to the Pacific soon thereafter, he joined the submarine tender *Rainbow* at Olongapo, Philippine Islands, on September 11, 1911.

Shortly before his 26th birthday, on April 2, 1914 Franklin married Marguerite Horne of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and they had three children.

Franklin reported to the gunboat *Pampanga* as executive officer on June 23, 1914 for a short tour in the southern Philippines.

After returning to the United States, Lt. (jg.) Van Valkenburgh joined the battleship *Connecticut* on November 11, 1914. After starting postgraduate work in steam engineering at the Naval Academy in September 1915, he took further instruction at Columbia University before reporting for duty on the battleship *Rhode Island* in March 1917. At the start of World War I Van Valkenburgh served as the *Rhode Island's* engineering officer. Shortly after, Van Valkenburgh started his first tour as an instructor at the Naval Academy. On June 1, 1920, Van Valkenburgh reported on board the battleship *Minnesota* for duty as engineer officer, and he held that post until the battleship was decommissioned in November 1921.

He again served as an instructor at the Naval Academy until May 15, 1925 before joining *Maryland* on June 26.

Commissioned Commander on June 2, 1927 while in Maryland, he soon reported for duty in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations on May 21, 1928 and served there during the administrations of Admirals Charles F. Hughes and William V. Pratt.

Detached on June 8, 1931, Van Valkenburgh received command of the destroyer *Talbot* on July 10th and commanded Destroyer Squadron 5 from March 31, 1932. After attending the Naval War College, Newport, RI, and completing the

senior course in May 1934, Comdr. Van Valkenburgh next served as inspector of naval materiel at the New York Navy Yard before going to sea again as commanding officer of the destroyer *Melville* for two years. Valkenburgh was promoted to captain while commanding *Melville* on December 23, 1937.

On February 5, 1941, Van Valkenburgh relieved Capt. Harold C. Train as commanding officer of the battleship *Arizona*. Newly refitted at Puget Sound, *Arizona* served as flagship of Battleship Division 1 for the remainder of the year, primarily at Pearl Harbor with two trips to the west coast.

On December 4th, the battleship went to sea in company with the *Nevada* and *Oklahoma* for night surface gunnery exercises, returned to Pearl Harbor independently on December 5th to moor at berth F-7 alongside Ford Island.

Both Capt. Van Valkenburgh and the embarked division commander, Rear Admiral Isaac C. Kidd, spent the next Saturday evening, 6 December, on board.

Shortly before 0800 on December 7, Japanese planes roared overhead, shattering the Sunday peace and punctuating it with the explosion of bombs and the staccato hammering of machine guns. Captain Van Valkenburgh sped forward from his cabin and arrived on the navigation bridge where he immediately began to direct his ship's defense.



A quartermaster in the pilot house asked if the captain wanted to go to the conning tower, a less-exposed position in view of the Japanese strafing, but Van Valkenburgh refused to do so and continued to man a telephone, fighting on in defense of his ship.

A violent explosion suddenly shook the ship, throwing the three occupants of the bridge, Van Valkenburgh, an ensign, and the quartermaster, to the deck, and shattering the bridge windows. Dazed and shaken, the ensign stumbled through the flames and smoke and escaped, but the others were never seen again.

A continuing fire, fed by ammunition and oil, blazed for two days until finally put out on December 9th. A subsequent search recovered only Capt. Van Valkenburgh's class ring.

Captain Van Valkenburgh was awarded the Medal of Honor, posthumously, by the President of the United States in the name of Congress, with the following citation:

For conspicuous devotion to duty, extraordinary courage, and complete disregard of his own life, during the attack on the Fleet in Pearl Harbor by Japanese forces, on 7 December 1941. As Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. ARIZONA he gallantly fought his ship until the U.S.S. ARIZONA blew up from magazine explosions and a direct bomb hit on the bridge which resulted in the loss of his life.