



**Missouri State Society
Daughters of the American
Revolution**

PATRIOT OF THE MONTH



ROBERT "BOB" W. LENTS

Robert Lents grew up on an Iowa farm. Like most young men of his age, he felt the urge to join the Navy and "see the world," so at the age of seventeen, Bob tried to join the Navy, but was told he would be called later.

Five months later, he reported for duty on a six-year voluntary enlistment. He was sent to the Great Lakes Naval Training Center for Boot and it was there he volunteered for submarines. He was sent to the Submarine Base at Pearl Harbor for schooling where he also worked in the mine and torpedo shops for the remainder of 1939 and much of 1940.

His first assignment was to the USS Seawolf at Manila, Philippines. After serving seven months there and qualifying in submarines, he was assigned to the USS Perch.

Bob recalls, "I will never forget the morning of December 8, 1941, as Manila's newspaper headlines declared in large bold letters,

PEARL HARBOR BOMBED.' The hairs on the back of my neck stood up and an icy chill swept through my body as the reality of that headline raced through my mind...over and over again..."We are at war...we are...at war!"

In the Perch's first war patrol, they made a daring daylight attack and sank a 5600-ton supply ship out of Hong Kong. The Perch was badly damaged and was ordered to Darwin, Australia for repairs, in late January 1942. Repaired and re-supplied, the Perch was assigned duty in the Java Sea in February 1942. The enemy sighted the Perch on March 1, and there followed many attacks to destroy her. The damage was so severe, the decision was made to abandon and scuttle the Perch. The entire crew got into the water safely and Japanese ships picked them up. Bob and his crewmates were now Prisoners of War.

Japanese treatment received by POWs in the camps was of the most brutal, humiliating and degrading type. POWs were constantly and consistently subjected to heavy beatings without reason, with clubs, rope hawsers, shovels, iron bars, etc. Arms and legs were broken, teeth knocked out, and worse. Water was dangerous to drink and insufficient in supply causing life threatening diseases. Food was maliciously reduced causing severe malnutrition and disease. POWs were stricken with malaria and died without treatment. And through it all, the POWs were forced to work under inhumane conditions, with a severe lack of medicine and medical treatment.

On September 18, 1945, after three and one half years as a Japanese Prisoner of War, Bob was liberated and flown to Calcutta, India, to a US Army hospital. Soon after, he arrived at St. Albans, Long Island, NY.

Bob married Carolyn, his wife of 59 years in early 1946. On December 30, 1946, he received a Medical Discharge because of a neck injury received when the Perch was sunk. He returned to Iowa, worked at several occupations, took the Civil Service exam and was employed as Postmaster in his hometown. He later transferred to rural mail carrier in order to be outside. He and Carolyn retired to Mountain Home, AR in 1976.

Bob summarizes his POW experience: "There is no way to relate what being a Prisoner of War does to the mind, body, and spirit of the prisoner....Not hearing from home, not knowing whether your country still exists as a sovereign nation, not knowing the fate of your loved one, shipmates, family....wears at the human spirit, and remains with you in the dark corners of your mind for the rest of your life.....No surviving POW under the conditions we of the Perch....experienced will ever say the horrors of those years have not left a permanent scar upon [us]."

Bob received many citations and awards, including a Presidential Unit Citation and Purple Heart. He is a Charter Member of the US Submarine Veterans POW Survivors Association, the first of its kind in any Submarine Veterans organization of today.

Peri Randall of St. Louis-Jefferson Chapter is honored to nominate Robert W. Lents as Patriot of the Month.



MSSDAR Patriot of the Month
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