

# Assignment brings WWII to life for Lovett students

By Katherine R. Dougan

A classroom lesson on the anniversary of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor became a living history lesson when one of the five survivors from the U.S.S. Arizona sent a postcard to the students.

Jennifer Smith teaches English and language arts to sixth-grade students at Lovett Elementary School in Clinton. Smith developed an interest in World War II because her late father, along with his twin brother Uncle Dave, who is 92, both served in the Navy during WWII.

"Uncle Dave saved every letter his mother wrote him; he was eighteen or nineteen years old [when he went to war]," Smith said.

"My goal [with her classroom Pearl Harbor Day lesson] is to try to make kids understand the human factor," Smith said. "I got them to think of kids and siblings they know who are eighteen to nineteen years old. That helped bring it to more of a reality when they starting thinking about it."

Of the 1,512 sailors and Marines aboard the Arizona, 1,177 were lost; the greatest number of casualties from any ship. Most were entombed in the sunken hull of the ship at the bottom of the harbor.

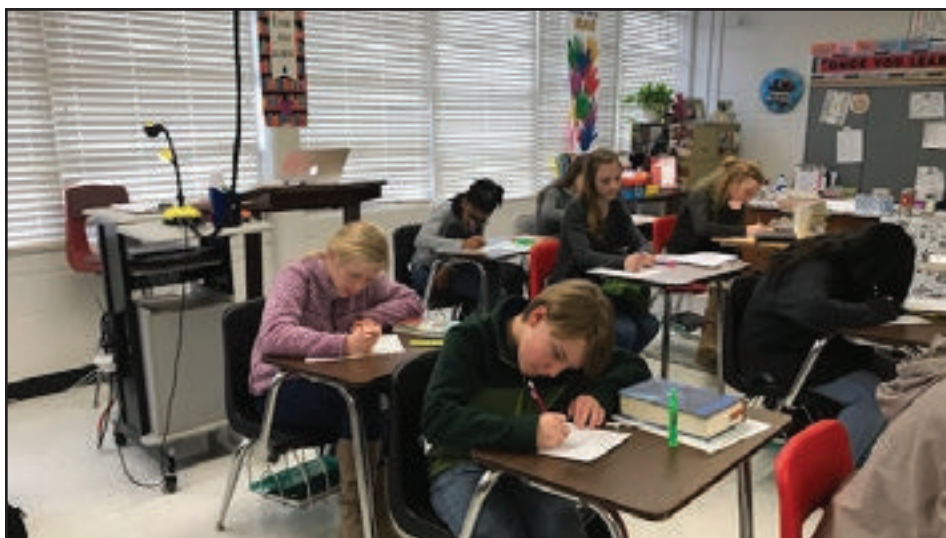
Part of the class curriculum is a letter-writing day, so Smith combined the Pearl Harbor history lesson with letter-writing day.

Two [Pearl Harbor] survivors have Facebook pages," Smith explained. She contacted one of the survivors' granddaughters, and got the names and addresses of four of the five survivors. The entire class wrote letters in December, thanking the sailors for their service to our country, and wishing them a Merry Christmas.

"It was a great, great day when we discovered those five guys were still living. The kids just outdid themselves on these letters; wrote them from the heart," Smith said. She also sent a cover letter with the students' letters, explaining that in her thirty years of teaching, she wants her students to learn about, observe and remember that day in 1941.

In the cover letter, Smith wrote: "When I learned that there are still five of you who survived that day on the U.S.S. Arizona, I knew the lesson would not be complete without reaching out to you in a personal way."

Smith received a postcard in January from survivor Ken Potts, who lives in Utah. The postcard has photos of the U.S.S. Arizona memorial, which is located at Pearl Harbor in Honolulu, Hawaii. The postcard also has photos of the five survivors, devastatingly young men wearing Navy uniforms and smiles. A note was attaching that reads: "Thanks to you and your students," and signed "Ken Potts, U.S.S. Arizona Survi-



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*Students in Jennifer Smith's sixth-grade class wrote letters to the five remaining survivors of the U.S.S. Arizona.*

vor, 12-7-1941." She also received the address of the fifth survivor, Lonnie Cook, who had gone into a nursing facility.

The five survivors the Lovett class wrote letters to the class are (ranks are from 1941) Quartermaster 3rd

Class Lou Conter, Fire Controlman 3rd Class Lauren Bruner, Seaman 1st Class Lonnie Cook, Coxswain Ken Potts and Seaman 1st Class Don Stratton.

Georgianna Motts, who goes by the nickname "Georgi," at the time

a sixth-grade student at Lovett, was one of the letter-writers. She introduced herself in the letter, and thanked Mr. Lou Conter for his service. And she wrote: "I have a father who was in the military, and while he hadn't done or seen anything as devastating as Pearl Harbor, I can still understand how horrible that must have been. I take what you did very personally. If it wasn't for some of the things you did, our Country may have turned out very differently."

"On December 7 of 1941, you went through something that I can only imagine has impacted your life greatly. Thank you for everything you have done. You're appreciated beyond compare."

The other students in Smith's class expressed thanks and gratitude to the survivors for their sacrifices.

"My goal was to impress upon my students that these were young men, not much older than themselves, who gave a great gift to us, the gift of freedom, and that it was very costly," Smith said.

It is certain Smith's lesson will not be forgotten.

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**Jonathan Ford**  
543B Highway 80W  
Clinton, MS 39056  
(601) 924-4567  
jford2@alfains.com



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