

Nikki Delamotte Award for Outstanding Narrative Writing

2021 Award Winner

“Anchor’s Away”

By Christopher Laux

Sweet release. I place my cigarette against my warm lips, the tip moist with saliva so that it rests in my mouth without effort. I suck the goodness into my lungs. My chest becomes a furnace, my throat the chimney. Black smoke pours from my mouth as I release the tension in my lungs. I sit at the vehicle entrance to Naval Base Pearl Harbor in a tollbooth. I await a truck full of ammunition for our Anti-aircraft rifles. I take another puff from my filtered beauty, and watch over the bay. The silhouettes of our great Navy ships are like the New York skyline I grew up within. The towering control bridges and massive weaponry on the battleships give me a sense of security, stability, and safety. This shipment of ammunition is the final resource the Navy needs to allow our base to become impenetrable.

My cigarette shrinks to my frustration. I take one final puff, then flick the butt onto the floor below me. The tip of my right pointer finger is black from the tar, like the smoke that seeps from my mouth. I check my watch, it’s silver face bouncing the sunlight directly into my eyes. I squint, and look away immediately. The shipment should have arrived hours ago. I pick up the telephone that rests in the booth beside me. I dial the number of my superior to question him about the latency of the resources. The ships on the water calms me. It allows me to forget the horrors that are occurring in the other half of the world.

Above the ships, far in the distance, I see dots. Multiple dots. Hundreds of dots. They look like a fleet of bees converging on the base. They move fast, buzzing right towards our ships. I squint, and I notice that the bees are planes. Our pilots aren’t supposed to be out until later in the day. I slam the telephone in my hand into the receiver. Each of the planes dashing towards our base has a big red dot painted on the side. This is not a flyover from our boys. This is an attack from the Rising Sun.

I rip the door to my booth open, my arms and legs flailing as I escape the room. I am a couple hundred meters out from the docks. I am on the road, pumping my arms and throwing my legs so that I can reach my captain in time. My dog tag bounces from my chest to my chin, the cold steel bruising my freshly shaven face. The fleet of attackers move closer. There are no alarms. There are no sirens blaring throughout the base. Each time my boot scrapes against the pavement I move faster. My body aches, my lungs sting from the treat I enjoyed moments ago. In only a matter of seconds, the planes will become

close enough to drop their bombs on our ships. Our ships that desperately need a shipment of ammunition.

The planes are nearly overhead. I continue to dash past the palm trees, screaming for everyone to take cover. Screaming for men to use the small bit of ammunition we have left. The Japanese planes dive down. I am speechless. I watch as they plunge into our ships, fireballs engulfing the water in front of me. My ears ring, a high-pitched scream filling my surroundings. Boom! Boom! Boom! Three fighters slam into the USS Arizona. I watch as men hurl their flaming bodies overboard into the rough waters. I watch as the control bridge of the USS Arizona topples onto a group of helpless soldiers. I trip on myself and fall to the pavement. I scrape my left cheek, leaving a trail of skin and blood behind me. I do not feel the pain. I can feel nothing.

I am almost at a hangar full of friendly fighter jets. I look up. A Japanese fighter nosedives towards it. I push myself to my feet and dash in the opposite direction. I feel an unbearable wave of heat, followed by the loudest sound imaginable. I am forced once again to the ground, my back bubbling, and my shirt on fire. I do not care. I stand back up and peer back at the wreckage. I see a man crawling towards me. He is nothing but a torso with one arm. His yells are antagonizing. The scene is horrific. Before I can run to his aid, his lifeless body falls limp to the burning ground. I feel his pain.

A rumbling begins, an engine revving in the direction of my tollbooth. I see a truck filled to the brim with anti-air shells barrel around a corner. Finally, the resources have arrived. The driver has a look in his eyes. A look of fear, a look of knowledge, and a look of prayer. He grips the steering wheel tight, knowing his mission is critical to everyone's survival. Suddenly, a horrendous sound rips through the air. A Gatling gun. A Japanese plane flies overhead and fills the driver with hundreds of bullets. The truck implodes, its massive body tossed into the smoggy air. I am once again thrown from my feet, back onto the rugged pavement. The truck lands in the sand. Its motionless skeleton resembling all hopes of survival. Black smoke seeps from where the engine used to rest, reminding me of the beauty that once escaped from my lungs.

I cannot stand. I tell my legs to move, yet they do not respond. I grip the road with my charred palms and twist myself towards the bay. I watch as our ships fire their last shots at the Japanese attack. They fail. Some ships attempt an escape and are littered with explosives. Some men run, knowing that if they die their wives will be alone with their children. The USS Arizona floods with water. It sinks like the soul of everyone on the base. Our anti-aircraft guns fire and hit enemy planes, but it is not enough. A single tear rolls down my scarred face. A single truck would have changed the story. A single truck would have saved our men. A single truck would have kept the USS Arizona afloat.