

Clarence Hamilton

U.S. Navy – Petty Officer 1st Class (Machinist's Mate)



Died on December 7, 1941 at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii
 Killed while serving on the *U.S.S Arizona*
 Missing In Action – remains not recovered

		
		
Purple Heart	Navy Combat Action Ribbon	American Defense Service Medal
American Campaign Medal	Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal	World War II Victory Medal

Machinist's Mate First Class (MM) 1c Clarence James Hamilton was born August 13, 1920, in Crab Creek, Henderson County, North Carolina, to Charles Spurgeon Hamilton (1890-1954), a farmer, and Mona Lee Thomas Hamilton (1891-1935), a homemaker. Clarence had two brothers, Herman Ellis (1911-1975) and Charles Spurgeon (1926-1999), and three sisters, Thelma Elizabeth (Buettgenbach) (1909-1979), Susan Frances (Wyatt/Smith/Banks) (1915-2003), and a younger sister, who died in childbirth. His mother died in nearby Hendersonville just after his 15th birthday. He and his father and a younger sibling soon moved to Manette, Washington, near Bremerton -- where Thelma had previously moved to and found a husband.

Clarence enlisted in the Navy at Seattle, Washington, on January 11, 1937, and reported aboard USS Arizona (BB-39) on April 15, 1937. He advanced through the ranks and by 1940 he had been promoted to MM2c. In April 1940, the USS Arizona was transferred from San Pedro, CA, to Pearl

Harbor, HI, as part of a deterrent to Japanese aggression in the Western Pacific. As ship's company, Clarence moved with the ship. In October 1940, the ship was temporarily homeported at Puget Sound Navy Yard in Bremerton, Washington, for a major overhaul before returning to Pearl Harbor in January 1941. However, Clarence had met someone while the ship was in Bremerton; a Manette woman he had fallen in love with. Her name was Margaret Marion McAboy (1922-1986), a telephone operator. They married on June 28, 1941, in Kitsap, Washington, while the USS Arizona was anchored for two weeks at San Pedro, California. Unfortunately, Clarence was soon back onboard the battleship, which was headed for Hawaii on July 1, never to return to the mainland. Margaret stayed in Bremerton with her relatives at 502 Olympia Avenue while Clarence remained onboard the USS Arizona based in Pearl Harbor. On November 1, he was promoted to MM1c.

At the onset of the December 7, 1941, attack, the battleship USS Arizona (BB-39) was moored at berth Fox 7 on "Battleship Row." The repair ship Vestal (AR-4) was on the port side, and the starboard side faced the northeastern shore of Ford Island. Just before 8 am, the ship's air raid alarm sounded, and the crew was ordered to general quarters. During the attack the battleship was struck by as many as eight aerial bombs, including one 1,700 lb. armor-piercing shell which penetrated the deck near the Number 2 turret and detonated in the smokeless powder magazine, causing a "cataclysmic" explosion "which destroyed the ship forward" and ignited a fire which burned for two days. Most of the Arizona crewmen who perished in the attack died instantly during the explosion. The ship quickly sank to the bottom of the harbor along with 1,177 of the 1,512 personnel on board, representing about half the total number of Americans killed that day.

MM1c Hamilton was lost in the attack on the USS Arizona (BB-39). Initially he was reported as Missing in Action (MIA) and later was reported as Killed In Action (KIA). Clarence's remains were never recovered and remain entombed on the USS Arizona among the 900+ souls still onboard. He was awarded a Purple Heart Medal and other awards posthumously. His name is engraved at the USS Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor and in the Courts of the Missing at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, located in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Clarence's father returned to Henderson County in North Carolina prior to Clarence's death. His brother, Charles, served in the Navy during WWII from 1944-1946. His widow, Margaret, remarried on October 24, 1942, to another sailor, Petty Officer George E Donahue, who was stationed aboard the USS Nevada.

This profile was researched and written on behalf of the USS Arizona Mall Memorial at the University of Arizona.