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Jim Downing, Second Oldest Survivor of Pearl Harbor, Passes Away

Colorado Springs, Colo.—Jim Downing, the second oldest known survivor of the attack on Pearl Harbor, passed away on February 13, 2018. His heart function declined following surgery in recent weeks, and he was unable to rally. He was 104.

Jim Downing was born August 22, 1913, in Oak Grove, Missouri, a small community on the eastern outskirts of Kansas City. While his family moved around frequently during Jim's early years, he spent most of his childhood in Plevna, Missouri, where his father owned a general store. At the time Jim left home for the Navy in 1932, he had never lived in a house with indoor plumbing or electricity.

Jim joined the Navy at age 19. His first assignment was on the USS *West Virginia*, where he served as gunner's mate 1st class and postmaster. While stationed in Southern California in 1940, Jim met his future wife, Morena, at her college graduation. In July 1941, they were married in Hawaii, where Jim was stationed. "The altar was covered with orchids for which we paid \$10. The bill for the 55-guest banquet was \$55," Jim said.

Just 149 days later, the Downings' lives were turned upside down by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. "I lost everything I owned except the clothes on my back. The only money we had was the change in Morena's purse. On Christmas Day, Morena left Hawaii on a passenger liner turned military transport. We would not see each other face-to-face for the next 18 months."

Jim's life would be forever linked to the "date which will live in infamy." During the attack, with a fire hose in one hand, Jim memorized the name tags of the fallen men around him so he could write a personal letter to their families.

Jim's Navy career culminated with him becoming the commanding officer of the USS *Patapsco* from 1952 until 1955, during the Korean War. While in hostile waters he was exposed to the equivalent of 470 dental x-rays over his entire body when radio-active ash from the "H" bomb being tested at Bikini Atoll covered his ship.

In 1956, after 24 years in the Navy, Jim went to work for The Navigators, a worldwide Christian ministry, with which he had been affiliated since its founding in 1933.

"My life's ambition was changed when I became [founder Dawson's Trotman's] spiritual descendant," Jim once said. "I had planned to attend law school and enter political office. After meeting Dawson, my life became all about availability to his Lord and mine."

Jim and his family moved to Colorado Springs in 1956 when he became a full-time staff member of The Navigators. During his long career, he served as Glen Eyrie supervisor, military ministry director, treasurer, headquarters manager, assistant to the president, director of the Navigator ministry in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, vice president, and deputy president.

Jim officially retired in 1983, but in many ways his ministry was just beginning. His retirement allowed him to travel the world to speak and teach. His practical application of the Bible, his warmth and wit, made Jim a popular speaker, especially among college students.

Jim was also the author of three books, published by NavPress:

- [Meditation](#) (1976)
- [Living Legacy: Reflections on Dawson Trotman and Lorne Sanny](#) (2007)
- [The Other Side of Infamy](#) by Jim Downing, with James Lund (2016)

The Navigators U.S. President Doug Nuenke says, “Jim was an influence among us for walking with God and having our life’s work flow from our knowledge of the Word and walk with Christ. Jim has influenced me by being a man who finished well—with a spirit of humility and faith, not demanding influence but having influence because all see the character of Jesus in his life.”

Jim is survived by six children, nine grandchildren, and 10 great-grandchildren, including his daughter Marobeth Ruegg; his son Jon Downing and his wife, Cheryl; son Joe Downing; son Don Downing and his wife, Deb; son David Downing and his wife, Crystal; and daughter Joy Riley and her husband, Mark. His son James died of a heart attack in 2013. Morena, his wife of 68 years, died in 2010.

Visit jimdowning.net for more information on Jim’s life and ministry.

The Navigators® helps people come to know Jesus Christ and be more like Him as they navigate through life—a goal captured by The Navigators motto, “To know Christ, make Him Known, and help others do the same.” Characterized by intentional, Bible-based, life-to-life discipleship, The Navigators makes disciples of all nations and equips those disciples to do the same for others, producing generations of disciplemakers.