

(Letter from William Czako)

December 7, 1941  
Pearl Harbor, JH

U.S.S. New Orleans

Dear Sis:

It is now 9:05 Sunday morning and we've been bombed now for over an hour. Our anti aircraft guns are yammering and every so often a bomb strikes so close as to rock this ship. Again a bomb. We're helpless down here in the Forward Engine Room because our main engines are all tore down. We're trying to get underway if possible. We were just struck by a bomb near the bow. We're fighting back as much as possible because we have no power to load our guns, no power circuits to fire them. It is all being done by hand. This seems to you like a nonchalant letter but it's the straight dope. There is only a handful of us down here as most of our men are ashore on Liberty. They really caught us sleeping this time. For a ship being in a Navy Yard for overhaul, we're putting up a good fight. The first officer has come down here now to take charge. We've lit off all the boilers that are not out of commission and are trying to get underway so that we will not be altogether helpless by laying alongside the dock and be a stationary target. Those bombs are getting closer – God grant that they do not hit that loaded oil tanker that is lying right across from us. Ten million gallons of fuel oil would bathe this ship in an inferno of fire. There are destroyers laying near us and three other cruisers. They must be the targets including us. I am on the interior communications telephone and I can hear the various stations screaming orders at one other. A man just brought us our gas masks. We have four engines but we can at the best only use 2. We're getting steam up though. The firing of the guns have abated somewhat but we've received orders to get underway as quickly as steam can be raised. The firing has continued. Wave after wave of bombers must be coming. We've figured that some aircraft carriers must be the source of these fast dive bombing planes. We've been struck several times now but fortunately there are no casualties as yet. It seems funny to be writing like this when it may be your last. I've never figured it to be like this. The next bomb may be our last but I will keep writing until I am told to stop or am given another job. Some battleships that are tied up to the piers near the Fleet Air Base are reported to be afire. It seems that the airbase was their first objective and the battleships were just too close to that field. We were really caught short this time. ... There is another lull and only sporadic bursts from our pom poms. Preparations to get underway are still continuing. It seems impossible with all that machinery tore up but still we'll do what we can. The order has come now to secure from general quarters. We were under fire for nearly two hours and I'm going to sneak up to topside to see what happened –