

7 DECEMBER 1941

The attack on Pearl Harbor was the culmination of a decade of deteriorating relations between Japan and the United States over the status of China and the security of Southeast Asia. The breakdown began in 1931 when Japanese army extremists, in defiance of government policy, invaded and overran the northernmost Chinese province of Manchuria. Japan ignored American protests, and in the summer of 1937 launched a full-scale attack on the rest of China. Although alarmed by this action, neither the United States nor any other nation with interests in the Far East was willing to use military force to halt Japanese expansion.

Airmen from Ford Island Naval Air Station stare in disbelief to where *USS Shaw* has just blown up. Inset above: This Nakajima B5N2 horizontal bomber was the command aircraft of the Pearl Harbor attack leader, Cmdr. Mitsuo Fuchida.

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN BATCHELOR
COURTESY ARIZONA MEMORIAL MUSEUM ASSOCIATION



Over the next three years war broke out in Europe and Japan joined Nazi Germany in the Axis alliance. The United States applied diplomatic and economic pressure to try to resolve the Sino-Japanese conflict. The Japanese government viewed these measures, especially an embargo on oil, as threats to their nation's security. By summer 1941 both countries had taken positions from which they could not retreat without a loss of national prestige. Although both governments continued to negotiate, Japan had already decided on war.

The attack on Pearl Harbor was an integral part of the Japanese grand strategy of southern expansion. The objective was to immobilize the Pacific Fleet so the United States could not interfere with the invasion of Asia and the western Pacific. The principal architect of the attack was Adm. Isoroku Yamamoto, Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese Combined Fleet. Though personally opposed to war with America, Yamamoto knew that Japan's only hope of success in such a war was a quick and decisive victory. America's superior economic and industrial might would tip the scales in its favor during a prolonged conflict.

On November 26 the Japanese attack fleet of 33 warships and auxiliary craft, including six aircraft carriers, sailed from northern Japan for the Hawaiian Islands. It followed a route that took it far to the north of the normal shipping lanes. By early morning, December 7, 1941, the ships had reached their launch position, 230 nautical miles north of O'ahu. At 6 am, some 12 nautical miles outside the entrance to Pearl Harbor, five midget submarines carrying two crewmen and two torpedoes each were launched from larger mother subs. Their mission: enter Pearl Harbor before the air strike, remain submerged until the attack was underway, then cause as much damage as possible.

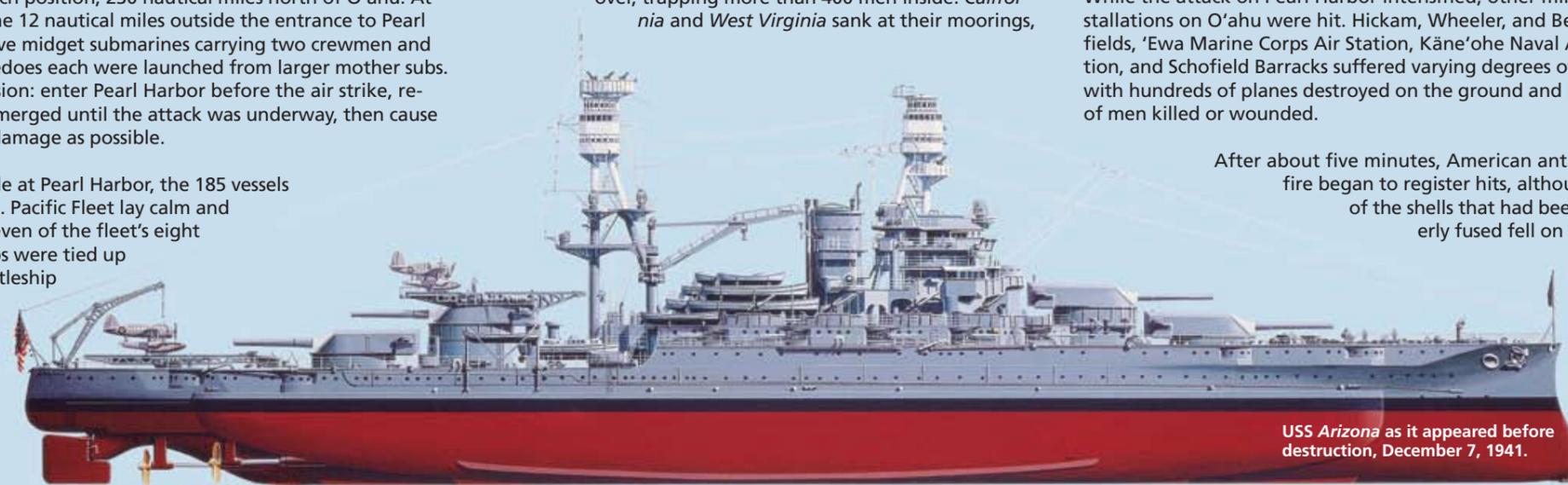
Meanwhile at Pearl Harbor, the 185 vessels of the U.S. Pacific Fleet lay calm and serene. Seven of the fleet's eight battleships were tied up along Battleship

Row on the southeast shore of Ford Island. Naval aircraft were lined up at Ford Island and Kāne'ohe naval air stations and at 'Ewa Marine Corps Air Station. Aircraft belonging to the U.S. Army Air Corps were parked in groups as defense against possible saboteurs at Hickam, Wheeler, and Bellows airfields.

At 6:40 am, the crew of the destroyer *USS Ward* spotted the conning tower of one of the midget subs headed for the entrance to Pearl Harbor. *Ward* sank the sub with depth charges and gunfire, then radioed the information to headquarters. Before 7 am, the 'Ōpana Mobile Radar Station near Kahuku Point picked up a signal indicating a large flight of planes approaching from the north. These were thought to be either aircraft flying in from the carrier *Enterprise* or an anticipated flight of B-17s from the mainland, so no action was taken.

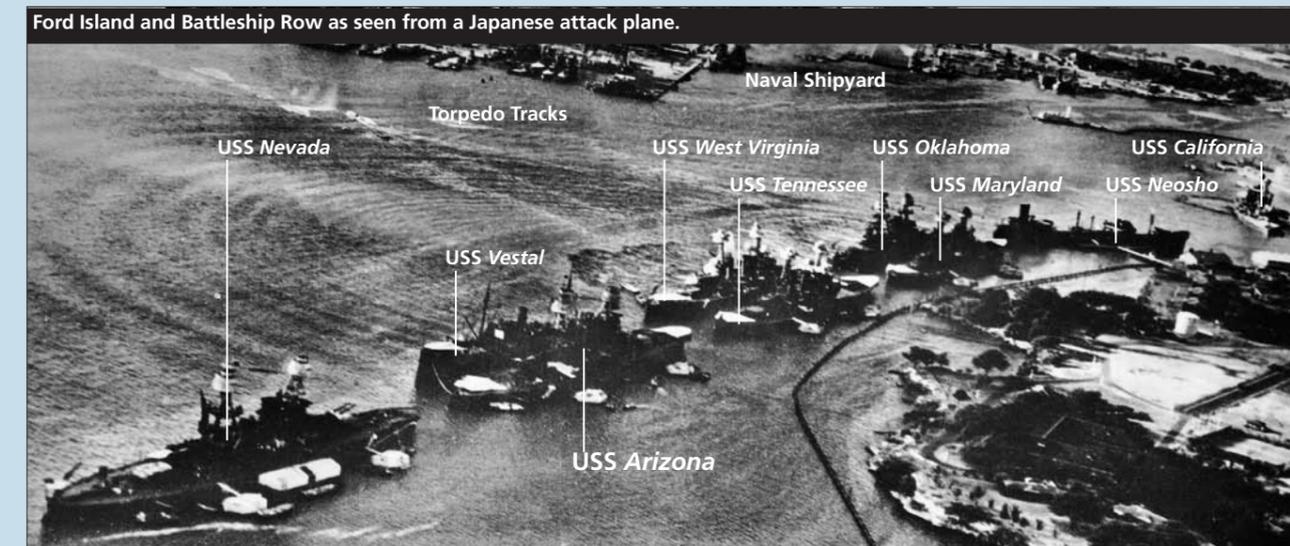
The first wave of Japanese aircraft arrived over their target areas shortly before 7:55 am. Their leader, Cmdr. Mitsuo Fuchida, sent the coded messages "To, To, To" and "Tora, Tora, Tora," telling the fleet that the attack had begun and that complete surprise had been achieved.

At approximately 8:06 am, *USS Arizona* exploded when a 1,760-pound armor-piercing bomb slammed through its deck and ignited its forward ammunition magazine. In less than nine minutes, it sank with 1,177 of its crew, a total loss. *USS Oklahoma*, hit by several torpedoes, rolled completely over, trapping more than 400 men inside. *California* and *West Virginia* sank at their moorings,



USS Arizona as it appeared before destruction, December 7, 1941.

USS ARIZONA MEMORIAL/JALAN CHESLEY
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while *USS Utah*, converted to a training ship, capsized with more than 50 of its crew. *Maryland*, *Pennsylvania*, and *Tennessee* all suffered significant damage. *USS Nevada* attempted to run out to sea, but took several hits and had to be beached to avoid sinking and blocking the harbor entrance.

While the attack on Pearl Harbor intensified, other military installations on O'ahu were hit. Hickam, Wheeler, and Bellows airfields, 'Ewa Marine Corps Air Station, Kāne'ohe Naval Air Station, and Schofield Barracks suffered varying degrees of damage, with hundreds of planes destroyed on the ground and hundreds of men killed or wounded.

After about five minutes, American anti-aircraft fire began to register hits, although many of the shells that had been improperly fused fell on Honolulu,

where residents assumed they were Japanese bombs. At about 8:40 am a second wave of attacking planes continued the destruction inside the harbor, heavily damaging *USS Shaw*, *USS Sotoyomo*, *USS Nevada*, and floating dry dock YFD-2. The Japanese continued air attacks on Hickam, Wheeler, 'Ewa, and Kāne'ohe airfields, causing heavy losses of aircraft and reducing American ability to retaliate. Some Army pilots, however, managed to get in the air and may have shot down 12 enemy planes. Shortly before 10 am the second wave withdrew to carriers approximately 200 nautical miles to the north. The attack was over. World War II had come to America.

The U.S. Navy had suffered its greatest defeat. Twenty-one vessels were sunk or damaged. American air power on the island of O'ahu was smashed. American dead totaled 2,390, with hundreds wounded. Japanese losses were 29 planes, 55 airmen, five midget submarines, and nine crewmen. In the wake of such a disaster, Americans rallied. A once-divided nation was now committed to avenge Pearl Harbor. The battle cry "Remember Pearl Harbor!" carried the nation forward for the next three and a half years. In 1945 America and its allies achieved victory over Japan, Nazi Germany, and Italy. Today former enemies meet at this memorial in peace, to remember a time of war. The legacy of Pearl Harbor still haunts us.