

Japan. The embargo would progressively weaken Japan, and the estimated tonnage of U.S. Navy ships on the launching ways in 1941 and future construction of American warships would jeopardize and eventually overwhelm Japanese hegemony in the western Pacific. With this manifest dilemma before Japanese strategists, Adm. Isoroku Yamamoto, commander in chief, Combined Fleet, proposed an initial air strike against the American battle fleet at Pearl Harbor, where its headquarters had been moved from San Diego in July 1941. The objective was to damage U.S. forces sufficiently to keep them temporarily on the defensive and to prevent the American battle fleet from intervening with the Japanese southern advance.

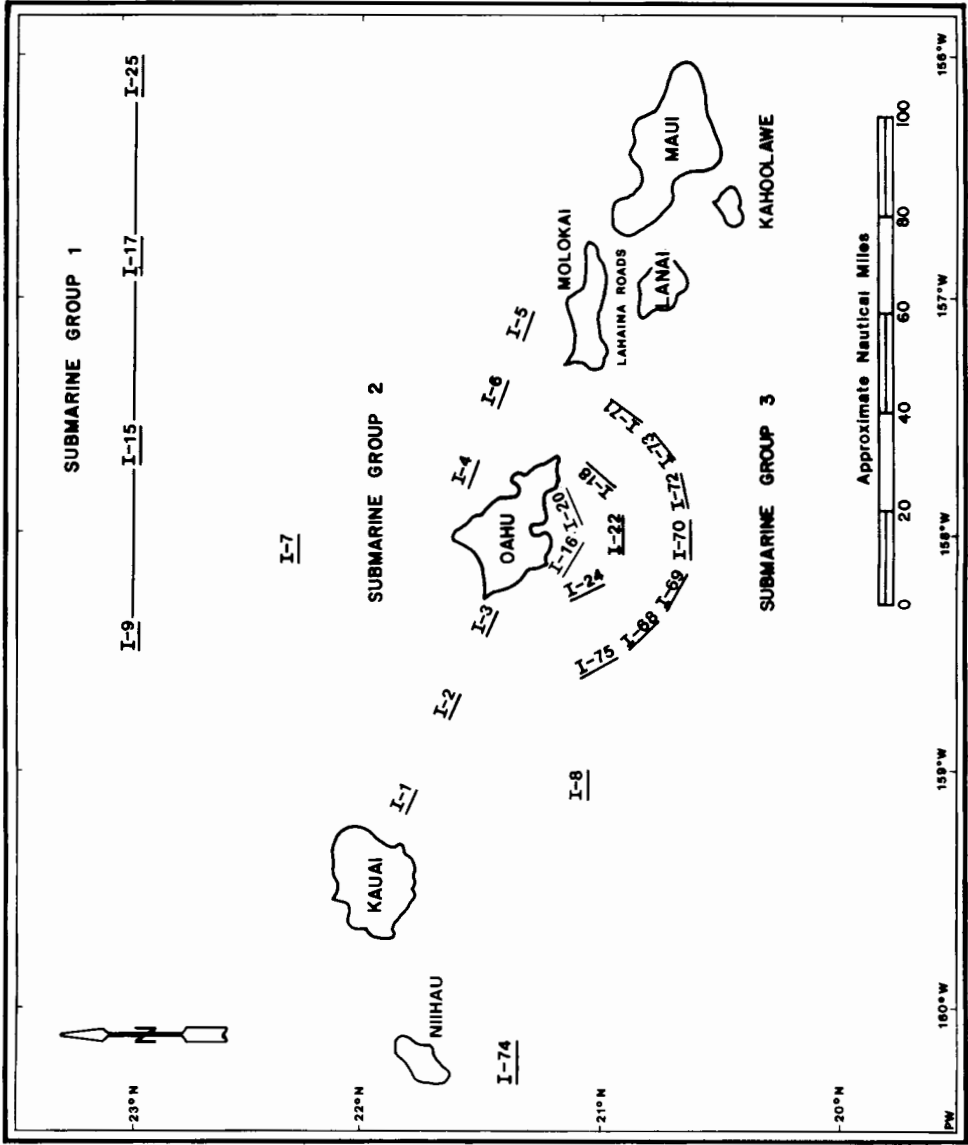
Long-range prewar strategy was suddenly upset. The decisive battle and the strategy of attrition against the American fleet had remained largely unchanged since the late 1920s. The chief innovation came in the 1940 plan, when the site of the projected battle was moved nearly 2,000 miles eastward from the Marianas to the Marshalls.<sup>3</sup> An entirely new role for submarines was hammered out. In general, more than twenty submarines were to precede the carrier strike force to Hawaiian waters and there check on possible American fleet movements. If warships were sighted, the submarines would track, but not fire on, the ships until the start of the air strike. Thereafter, the submarines were to lurk outside of Pearl Harbor and between the Hawaiian Islands and the U.S. mainland to attack any warships attempting to escape from the air strike, to finish off any damaged ships trying to limp back to mainland ports, and to prevent any reinforcements from reaching Oahu.

### Hawaiian Waters

With high risks but great expectations, Admiral Yamamoto issued the operational orders on 5 November 1941 for the air assault on Pearl Harbor. The operational plan included an elaborate command structure for the powerful armada (see appendix 2).

#### THE DEPLOYMENT OF SUBMARINES OUTSIDE OF PEARL HARBOR

Submarines sortied from their home ports in Japan between 11 and 21 November; many of them sailed via Kwajalein, where they came under American intelligence surveillance. On 26 November U.S. Navy intelligence estimated that there was gathered "probably one-third of the [Japanese] submarine fleet."<sup>4</sup> All submarines were on station in



Hawaiian waters by “X” day minus one (6 December, Western Hemisphere).<sup>5</sup> (See map 1 for the disposition of Japanese submarines in Hawaiian waters at the time of the attack.)

Failure was prevalent, and the reasons are several. U.S. Navy antisubmarine warfare (ASW) forces were effective against the Japanese. For example, the *I-68*, some 30 miles from the entrance to Pearl Harbor, came under heavy depth-charge attack and suffered minor damage. The *I-69*, after launching an unsuccessful torpedo attack against a cargo ship on the night of 7 December, was near Barbers Point in southern Oahu when the submarine became caught in what the Japanese thought was an antisubmarine net.<sup>6</sup> (The *I-69* probably became entangled in some sort of stray American tow line or was caught in a harmless drill minefield used by U.S. Navy minesweepers for practice against dummy mines.) The submarine was also heavily depth charged. Capt. Nobuki Nakaoka, commander of Submarine Division 12, on board the *I-69*, recalled later that a depth-charge explosion under the hull produced a very hard shock, and the boat had to dive as deeply as possible. Leaks were dangerous, and it was impossible to use the ejection pump at such great depths. The Japanese sailors were determined to fight to the end, but they also feared defeat. Thus, they armed demolition explosives before making a final attempt to escape from their entanglement. At a depth of 250 feet, the *I-69* slipped out of the net by going full astern and blowing main tanks. The *I-69* was lucky to escape undetected on the surface after some 40 hours of struggle.<sup>7</sup>

Other boats of the Third Submarine Group were also depth charged and had little success. The *I-72* sank a small cargo vessel some 250 miles south of Oahu on 8 December, and the *I-75* made a similar claim 100 miles south of Kauai on 17 December. Having caused no damage to U.S. warships, plagued by failure and missed opportunities, the remaining submarines of the Third Submarine Group left Hawaiian waters on 17 December to return to Kwajalein.

Some fourteen other Japanese submarines patrolling in Hawaiian waters were no more effective. The three submarines assigned originally as an advance screening unit for the Carrier Strike Force joined four

Map 1. (*Opposite page*) Japanese submarines in Hawaiian Waters, December 1941. (Source: Japan, Bōeichō Bōeikenshūjo Senshibu, ed., *Sensuikan shi* (History of submarines), Senshi Sōsho (War history series), vol. 98 [Tokyo: Asagumo Shimbunsha, 1979], 95)

ocean-cruising submarines of the First Submarine Group to continue patrol operations in Hawaiian waters. Of these seven submarines, only the *I-9*, the flag submarine of Rear Adm. Tsutomu Satō, commander of Submarine Squadron 1, sank a cargo vessel—the U.S. steamer SS *Lahaina* (5,645 tons)—several hundred miles northeast of Oahu on 11 December. The seven older ocean-cruising submarines of the Second Submarine Group also continued patrols in Hawaiian waters until 11 January 1942. The flag submarine, *I-7*, launched its seaplane for a completely successful dawn reconnaissance flight around Pearl Harbor on 17 December. This flight occurred in spite of tightened defenses of Pearl Harbor. Thus, the high command in Tokyo received a full report of the damage caused by the air attack. In another minor action, the *I-4* sank one cargo vessel, the 4,858-ton Norwegian motorship *Hoegh Merchant*, off Makapuu Point, Oahu, on 14 December.

Japanese submarines in Hawaiian waters were plagued by mishaps and failure. Naval planners anticipated that the nine fleet-type submarines of the Third Submarine Group would have the best chance to attack the enemy. With their vantage point some 40 miles from Pearl Harbor, these submarines formed a dense line capable of concentrated attack on American warships off Oahu. The chief of staff to Admiral Yamamoto when the Pearl Harbor attack was planned noted that he “expected that more damage would be inflicted by submarine attacks, which would be continued over a longer period, than by the air attacks, which would be of comparatively short duration.”<sup>8</sup> Given pre-war expectations, the submarines’ failure in early December was particularly surprising and disappointing to the Japanese high command.

Part of the reason for the failure of the I-boats in Hawaiian waters concerned the manner of directing operations from afar. The commander of the Sixth Fleet, Vice Adm. Mitsumi Shimizu at Kwajalein, filled the air each night shortly before the air strike with radio messages to his submarines around the Hawaiian Islands. A U.S. Navy intelligence officer, then stationed at Pearl Harbor, wrote twenty-five years later that “port authorities in Hawaii were thus made conscious of the magnitude and to some extent the location of the Japanese submarine menace. They were consequently cautious in routing ships, and this had some bearing on the Japanese lack of success.”<sup>9</sup>

Capt. Kyūgorō Shimamoto, commander of Submarine Division 7, criticized submarine operations in Hawaiian waters at the outset of the war because there was no basic and coordinated plan of action. For

example, when a submarine sighted an enemy ship and was ordered to give chase and attack if possible, the submarine's originally assigned area of patrol was left unguarded while the attack was being pursued. Such operations were particularly ineffective if the submarine's top speed did not enable it to overtake its prey quickly. Moreover, Captain Shimamoto lamented the fact that Japanese submarines always had to contend with strong enemy ASW operations.<sup>10</sup>

Another submarine operation was carried out far from Hawaii, although still associated with the main attack. Several days before the attack on Pearl Harbor, two submarines were involved in elaborate air reconnaissance operations. (The Japanese made a determined effort, particularly during the first year of the war, to utilize submarine-borne aircraft in reconnaissance operations—see appendix 3.) Observing strict radio silence, the *I-10* reconnoitered Suva, Fiji, where its sea-plane was lost on 30 November. Then the *I-10* proceeded to Pago Pago, Samoa, arriving by 4 December. This I-boat sank the 4,473-ton Panamanian motorship *Donerail* in the South Pacific on 10 December before sailing to the west coast of the United States. The other submarine of the Reconnaissance Unit, *I-26*, sank the SS *Cynthia Olsen*, a 2,140-ton lumber freighter, about 900 miles northeast of Hawaii on 8 December. But these results were extremely modest for the grand north-south sweep of these two submarines.

#### THE SPECIAL ATTACK UNITS—MIDGET SUBMARINES

Five ocean-cruising submarines, each with a piggyback midget submarine Type A Target (*Kō hyōteki*), did not become part of the grand plans to attack U.S. forces until the fall of 1941. The five submarines were on their assigned stations near the entrance to Pearl Harbor on the night of 6 December (Hawaii time). In spite of trouble with the gyro compass of the *I-24*'s two-man midget submarine, its commanding officer, Ens. Kazuo Sakamaki, was determined to disembark in his little submarine as scheduled. The other four midget submarines were more easily launched before dawn on the day of the air attack. Nevertheless, almost no information was received from the five midget submarines after they sortied. Lt. (jg) Masaji Yokoyama in the *I-16*'s midget submarine reported "*tora, tora, tora*" (meaning surprise attack succeeded) at 2241 on 7 December. Thus, Japanese submariners believed that an explosion sighted near midnight was caused by a torpedo launched from Yokoyama's midget submarine. But this is not con-