

The day of infamy

On the morning of Sunday, December 7, 1941 – with little warning and no time to prepare – the tranquil Hawaiian island of Oahu was transformed into the first battleground of the Pacific War as Japanese forces launched a sudden and deadly assault...

While it now seems like the obvious conclusion of a direct attack on American forces, it was never Japan's intention to engage in total war across the Pacific with the US. In fact, Japanese planning and strategy during the 1930s and early 1940s was dominated by its desire to avoid this outcome knowing it lacked the troops, equipment and resources to sustain prolonged conflict across the vast expanse of the ocean. The need for raw materials, however, was driving its Southern Expansion Doctrine – an officially adopted national policy by 1936 that called for resource-rich areas of southeast Asia to come under its authority in support of its industry, and referred to the potential of the Pacific Ocean to become a 'Japanese lake'.

Planning and preparation for a move into the area began in earnest at that time, and was initially concerned with propaganda and espionage which aimed to generate support among populations of potential foreign targets who'd lived under European rule for several generations. As the time for military action drew closer, Japanese Imperial Army leaders became ever more obsessed by the threat America posed to its grand ambitions and started to promote the idea of a preventative strike to remove the potential obstacle of an American fightback in defence of European colonies in Asia and its own territories in the Pacific. Of particular concern for Japan was how America would react to incursion into the Philippines Islands.

Leading Japanese strategists were convinced their planned operations in Asia and the Pacific would draw the US into the Second World War, but believed a carefully orchestrated strike against a prominent American target would be enough to bully the US into submission before a long and expensive conflict had time to develop. As a result, an offensive against the US Navy in the Pacific was added to the list of targets for its southern expansion, and it was the Hawaiian islands that were selected for this bold and aggressive move.

What followed was a brilliantly devised and perfectly executed military operation that would go down in history as one of the greatest tactical blunders in the history of modern warfare.





A US Martin MB-1 biplane bomber on Luke Field in August 1918. ☉

Pearl Harbor

On February 1, 1941, General Order 143 issued by the United States Navy split the US Fleet into separate Atlantic, Asiatic and Pacific Fleets. War in Europe and the need to protect convoys providing vital aid to Britain off America's east coast had precipitated the move, but it was largely driven by the desire for a significant force in the Pacific to act as a deterrent to Japanese aggression. The new concentration of ships had already been sent out into the Pacific before the fleet had been formed – undertaking war exercises near Hawaii among other exploration activities – and once the new group had been officially created the US Navy base at Pearl Harbor, on the island of Oahu, was chosen as its home.

Hawaii, particularly its sugar trade, had been an area of significant interest for expansion in the US since the mid-19th century and – with seafaring traditions dating back to America's revolutionary days – US officials also saw the Pacific islands as being an important strategic location. Following the controversial overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, backed covertly by US businessmen there, Hawaii became an annexed territory in 1898 and work soon began creating facilities big enough to welcome the largest American ships. Focus initially was on Honolulu, but land space was at a premium with the establishment of various US departments and bureaus – and to further compound matters it was realised that the depth of the channels there was insufficient for the more sizeable American vessels. In 1908 the decision was made to move facilities to the Naval Station at Pearl Harbor and Congress sanctioned the dredging of the channel and lochs, as well as construction of a dry dock. Within two years, four deep-sea cargo ships had docked at the new base to deliver construction materials.

Expansion of the station on the shore continued at a rapid pace in the late 1910s and early 1920s, and the US also purchased Ford Island – sitting in the middle of the bay off

Pearl Harbor – with the intention of developing both US Army and Navy aviation capabilities. The island was chosen as the location for the 6th Aero Squadron that had been formed in Honolulu in 1917, and with the US Army's development of its aerial division the region also saw the installation of improved transport networks and a civilian airport.

Housing and aircraft hangars were erected at the base itself in 1918 along with a supply warehouse, machine shop, photography laboratory and a power plant.

As US Army air operations continued, the Navy also saw the potential for Ford Island to develop into a suitable area for its own aviation activity and sought to end Army occupation – only for US Secretary of War Newton D Baker to rule that it should be divided equally between the two branches of the armed forces.

A naval air station was opened and Luke Field – the island's airstrip named after First World War Medal of Honor recipient Frank Luke – was designated for joint US Army and Navy efforts. Restrictions on expansion as a result of

the Washington Naval Conference meant there was a lull in the rapid growth at Pearl Harbor in the 1920s and early 1930s, but once Secretary of State Stimson had decreed that the US no longer had to adhere to the agreed status quo in the Pacific, building work began again in earnest. Among the changes was the addition of another airfield on the mainland – Hickam Field, opened in 1939 – that boasted a 7000ft-long runway, the only one in the region capable of use by the large bombers that had begun to dominate US Army Air Force production.

Despite the extension of Luke Field's own runway to 3000ft, the army moved its aviation divisions to Hickam as soon as the new facility was ready, leaving Ford Island under complete jurisdiction of the Navy which, under direct presidential orders to increase battle-readiness, installed an additional barracks, a new repair hangar, offices and a control tower. Domestic and leisure facilities were also built to cater for a significant jump in the number of service personnel and their families to be stationed at Pearl Harbor.



B17Ds fly over the main gate at Hickam Field, having been sent to reinforce Pearl Harbor's defences in the summer of 1941. The large bombers wouldn't have been able to use the Hawaiian island's runways before the new installation at Hickam. ☉

The impressive sight of USS *Pennsylvania* under way off New York City during American's 1934 Naval Review. But, having been commissioned in 1916, she was already close to 20 at this time and by 1941 when she was assigned to the Pacific Fleet was considered elderly. With a maximum speed of just 21 knots she would have been an easy target for Japanese submarines or air attack while at sea. The *Pennsylvania* was a symbol of how the US had neglected its military during the isolationist period between the two world wars. ☹



Neutralising the Pacific Fleet

President Roosevelt supported the recreation of the Pacific Fleet by convincing Congress to back a sizeable expansion of the United States Navy on both coasts. The fall of France to the Nazi regime in Germany demonstrated the threat the US could face on two fronts, and so the fleet's move to Pearl Harbor was supplemented by B-17 bombers, 21 one of them deployed in Hawaii from California in May 1941.

A vast naval force headed by powerful battleships and aircraft carriers had been dispatched to Pearl Harbor, joined by an Army Air Force presence consisting of 754 officers, 6706 enlisted men and 233 army aircraft – and while evidence suggests it was the sole intention of this considerable battalion to bolster Pacific defences, Japan saw America's move out into the ocean as an aggressive one.

It caused consternation in Japan's highest offices, whose officials saw the perceived American posturing as an affront. Japan knew it had the superior military – the American government having curtailed defence spending during the period of the Great Depression and deeply entrenched isolationism – but also realised that Roosevelt was rebuilding as involvement in at least one of the theatres of conflict seemed more and more inevitable. The more aggressive elements of Japanese authority believed that because they still held the advantage – for the time being – the time had come to attack.

Militarists had significant influence in Japan's government throughout the early decades of the new century, and the political climate in the country shifted completely in 1941 when hardliner general Hideki Tojo

replaced the more moderate Fumimaro Konoye as prime minister – the latter having failed in his bid to see tensions with America relieved by diplomatic means. The Imperial Japanese Army and Navy enjoyed near autocracy – demonstrated by the government's inability to scale back advances in China – and with Tojo becoming Japan's figurehead the thirst for war was only increased.

The massing of US ships, aircraft and troops at the various bases in Pearl Harbor meant it became an obvious target for a debilitating strike that would prevent American opposition to Japan's Southern Expansion Doctrine before the US had a chance to catch up with the advanced development of Japan's military.

There was a long history of army and navy rivalry in Japan but, despite there



being no love lost between the pair, Tojo turned to Japan's greatest and most-respected naval officer – Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto – who had been developing a daring plan to launch a carrier-based air attack on the Hawaiian islands.

On November 5, 1941, Tojo authorised Yamamoto's plan of attack unless Roosevelt's government accepted all of its demands in the ongoing negotiations between the two countries, and set a deadline of November 25 for a response.

America remained steadfast and so Japan progressed with its plans to seize its desired territory in southeast Asia while simultaneously launching a surprise assault that would aim to render America's Pacific Fleet useless and negate the influence of the expanded US Navy and Army Air Force bases at Pearl Harbor.

Pearl Harbor: The chain of command

Emperor Hirohito

While his influence over the autocratic Army and Navy is questionable, the Pearl Harbor military operation had to be personally signed off by Japan's head of state. ☸



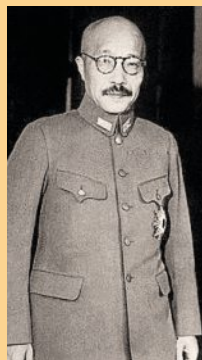
Prime Minister Fumimaro Konoye

Ultimately the prime minister was responsible for overseeing international relations and Konoye favoured a peaceful solution with America. Militarists disagreed and he was ousted. ☸



Prime Minister Hideki Tojo

Army general Tojo replaced Konoye and immediately put Japan on a war footing. He even embraced the bold plans of his old rival Yamamoto. ☸



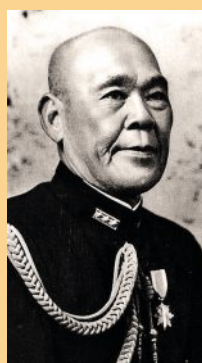
Naval Minister Koshiro Oikawa

An admiral and the main link between Japan's government and Imperial Navy, Oikawa was the first to see Yamamoto's official Pearl Harbor plan. A supporter of Konoye, once Tojo assumed power his influence was limited. ☸



Chief of Staff Osami Nagano

Japan's senior naval officer for most of the Pacific War, Nagano was against war with America and opposed Yamamoto's Pearl Harbor attack plan. He reluctantly approved when his top admiral threatened resignation. ☸



Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto

As commander-in-chief of Japan's combined fleet, Yamamoto relentlessly pursued his theory that a decisive early victory against America was required. He devised and oversaw Operation Hawaii. ☸



Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo

As commander of Japan's Kido Butai carrier group, Nagumo was responsible for the Pearl Harbor strike force at sea – although he was actually against Yamamoto's idea and had voiced his concerns in the months prior. ☸



Lieutenant Commander Minoru Genda

A pioneer of Japanese military aviation, Yamamoto turned to Genda for his expertise and gave him responsibility for training the required forces. ☸



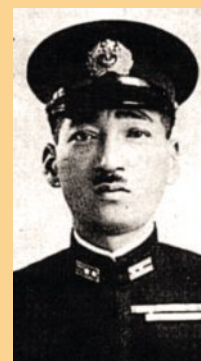
Admiral Takijiro Onishi

Head of Japan's Naval Aviation Development Division in the Ministry of Munitions, Onishi played a key role in many of the technical advances that made the Pearl Harbor attack possible. ☸



Commander Mitsuo Fuchida

Leading the first wave of aircraft, Fuchida remained in the skies over Pearl Harbor throughout the attack to offer first-hand reports on the success of the operation. He became a national hero on his return. ☸







An aerial view looking south-west across Pearl Harbor - the photograph taken on October 30, 1941. Ford Island is in the centre, with the naval yard across the channel above and Hickam Field just beyond. To the left of Ford Island is the Pacific Fleet Command Center and various other infrastructure, including fuel tanks. ©

A new kind of warfare

America's increasing presence in Hawaii made it a viable military target for Japan, but to actually carry out a large-scale operation in the territory would take something remarkable given its distance from the Japanese islands. Pearl Harbor was out of reach for Japan's bomber aircraft, and its traditional naval strategy was that its battleship force should remain close to home waters as a defensive line rather than being an offensive group. To hit America hard enough to achieve its aims, Japan would have to come up with something truly innovative, and so Yamamoto turned his attention to the carrier fleet under his command, which was the greatest of its kind in the world.

Yamamoto had used his position and remit to promote the importance of air power at sea, and during his country's naval air exercises of 1939-1940 he was buoyed by the increased capabilities of the aircraft that had been developed and the men piloting them. The admiral had particular praise for a simulated raid on harbour-based warships by torpedo-armed bombers and, while officers and Navy Ministry officials were less convinced, he believed its success proved his theory that a carrier-based attack – as long as it had the element of surprise – could be used against the US in the Pacific.

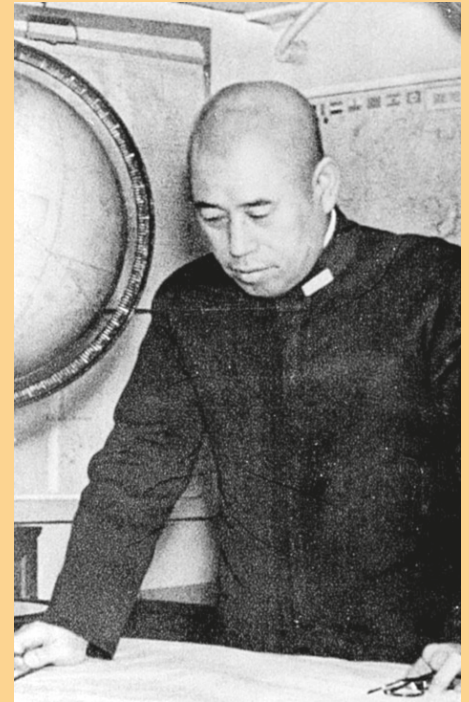
Later in 1940, on the night of November 11 and early hours of November 12, the British Navy launched a small-scale operation from the carrier *HMS Illustrious*, with its torpedo bombers hitting the Italian battle fleet while it was moored in the southern harbour of Taranto. The result was an overwhelming victory for the British, with the sinking of one Italian battleship and heavy damage sustained by two more. The British naval officer who oversaw the campaign, Admiral Andrew Cunningham, made bold statements about the utilisation of air forces having altered naval



British Admiral Andrew Cunningham, who stated that the carrier attack on Taranto had been a turning point for navies across the world. *Dutch National Archives* *

warfare forever – a prophecy that would be realised as the Pacific War progressed.

While he was already crafting his own idea, the British success at Taranto is unlikely to have gone unnoticed by Yamamoto – the Imperial Japanese Navy as a whole certainly paid it careful attention, sending its assistant naval attaché, Lieutenant Commander Takeshi Naito, to Berlin to investigate first-hand. A Japanese military mission also visited the harbour in May 1941 for discussions with the Italian navy. In theory a carrier attack had its significant risks,



Yamamoto commanded huge respect right across the Imperial Japanese Navy, and his departure was unthinkable. As such he was able to manoeuvre Japanese thinking to suit his own aims, and his Pearl Harbor attack plan was approved. ☸

but Taranto showed that the rewards could outweigh them and when the Pacific Fleet was positioned in Hawaii it put the 100-plus-strong concentration of ships within feasible reach.

On January 7, 1941, Yamamoto formally submitted his blueprint by sending a memo to Navy Minister Koshirō Oikawa but although his plan was deemed worthy of careful consideration, it had its objectors. Devising the campaign was one thing; seeing it come to fruition was going to be an entirely different challenge altogether.



A reconnaissance photograph shows the aftermath of the British attack on Taranto. ☸

LEFT: The development of the Japanese Zero fighter – as seen here aboard carrier *Akagi* – was crucial to the evolution of the Pearl Harbor operation, and allowed Yamamoto to utilise all six of Japan's carrier aircraft for the attack. ☸

Yamamoto canvassed support, and his carrier attack plan gained backers – but the major obstacle he faced was convincing the navy's general staff that the daring raid could work alongside traditional Japanese strategy of only using its sea-going force in defence of the homelands and territorial expansion.

Even after governmental military figures had decided that an aggressive strike was needed to protect the move into the Southern Resource Area, conservative elements of the Imperial Japanese Navy were not convinced by its merit and believed that the potential for losses of its prized ships was not worth the risk when they could be used to respond to any American action from defensive positions.

Yamamoto possessed a great deal of influence in the Japanese navy, but even he couldn't just undertake a mission of this magnitude without preventing clear-cut evidence that it could work and so he began lobbying the corridors of power in a bid to see his vision come to life. He began by ordering Admiral Takijiro Onishi – chief of staff of the Eleventh Air Fleet – to study the technical aspects. His opinion was that carrying out the mission would be difficult, but not impossible. Widely respected naval aviator Commander Minoru Genda – a long-time friend and associate of Yamamoto – agreed with Onishi's findings, and once again stressed the importance of the surprise factor; such a large force so far from home and deep in enemy territory could potentially be a sitting duck if its presence was detected ahead of the final launch. Yamamoto decided to wield his authority and instructed Onishi and Genda to compile a full tactical plan and begin the training of the necessary forces. He would concentrate on the politics.

The wrangling continued into the summer of 1941 with the navy general staff expressing doubts about the operation and particularly concerned by the size of the group Yamamoto wanted to commit. A series of developments in the late summer and autumn would go in Yamamoto's favour, however – the launch of two new carriers being one important factor, and an agreement between Japan's army and navy about a staggered approach to the conquest of territory in Southeast Asia lessening the impact of such a large naval force being thousands of miles out into the ocean.

A third key event was improvements made to the engine of Japan's premier fighter aircraft, the Mitsubishi A6M Zero, that meant it was now capable of supporting Japan's southern campaign without having to be transported closer by the carrier fleet. Yamamoto had directed much resource and effort to developing Japan's naval air fleet, a decision which now made a Pearl Harbor attack much more likely.

With the barriers all but removed, Yamamoto consolidated support by spreading the word to Japanese high command that he would resign if not allowed to continue with his plan. He was his country's most decorated naval officer and a national hero who commanded the respect of the often difficult-to-control Japanese navy – his departure was not something the general staff could allow, and Operation Hawaii was given the green light.



Crew members of the carrier *Akagi* gather on the flight deck at Hitikappu Bay; at this time still unaware of the journey that awaits. 🌐

A military masterpiece

Calling on all of his diplomatic experience and political skill, Yamamoto had successfully gone against decades of Japanese naval strategy to gain approval for his bold carrier strike plan – and he'd done so while simultaneously overseeing the meticulous preparation that would be needed to make it a success.

For the planning he relied on Genda, and it was his trusted commander who implemented solutions to two of the technical problems which – if unsolved – could have jeopardised the whole mission: executing torpedo strikes in the shallow harbour and making level bombing against battleships a worthwhile endeavour.

To counter these issues, Genda worked tirelessly on the development of Japan's weapons arsenal – first introducing modified torpedoes with wooden fins that prevented them getting stuck in the mud and silt of the seabed, and then instigating the development of armour-piercing bombs capable of causing massive damage even when released at a higher altitude by the bulkier level bombers.

Given the unprecedented nature of the mission they were devising, training for the attack on Pearl Harbor was also going to be crucial and once again Genda was given responsibility for this aspect. During the summer of 1941 he used Kagoshima City on the Japanese island of Kyushu – the location providing many of the same geographical elements and a similar infrastructure to those his forces would encounter upon reaching Hawaii. In training, crews had to navigate a 5000ft-high mountain before diving into the city below – avoiding buildings and smokestacks – before dropping to just a few hundred feet at the coast. There can be little doubt that the attention to detail Genda gave to the operation was crucial in helping Yamamoto convince the general staff that his plan was a viable one.

With logistics coming together under Genda's command, Yamamoto also had to contend with what was perhaps the most challenging aspect of the entire affair: maintaining the element of surprise. There were several individual parts of the operation that would make this difficult,

and any one of them failing would surely have meant the plug being pulled on the overall campaign – the fact that Yamamoto was able to ensure it all succeeded was an incredible feat of military leadership and tactics. The first major obstacle to present itself was hiding the change in Japanese naval strategy from American intelligence agencies, which Japan knew were monitoring their every move.

In November 1941 Japan began a radio communications campaign aimed at tricking the US into believing that it was business as usual for the Japanese fleet – and the navy used a planned exercise to 'hide' actual radio communications to, from and between the carrier aircraft. When the radios went silent in the aftermath, America had no reason to believe that the fleet wasn't sitting in home waters in its defensive position – as had always been the case – rather than being under way and en route to attack.

Now came Yamamoto's second hurdle: ensuring the six carriers, one light cruiser, nine destroyers, three submarines and eight tankers and supply ships that had been chosen for the raid arrived undetected. From early in the planning stage, Japan had been receiving information from its agent in Hawaii on the activity of the Pacific Fleet and had been using radio intelligence to monitor air force operations. It was the latter of these that revealed a critical lack of American reconnaissance missions in the waters north of Hawaii – a Japanese offensive from this area such an inconceivable proposition that it didn't even warrant consideration.

With a northern Pacific route chosen, on November 5 the order to begin operations was delivered to senior officers and six days later Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo – commander of the First Air Fleet and given overall command of the Pearl Harbor strike force at sea – received the final instructions and his ships were directed to their rendezvous point in the Kurile Islands.

The main strike elements of the force, including the Kido Butai carrier battle group, departed for a position north of Hawaii on November 26, with strict radio silence observed.



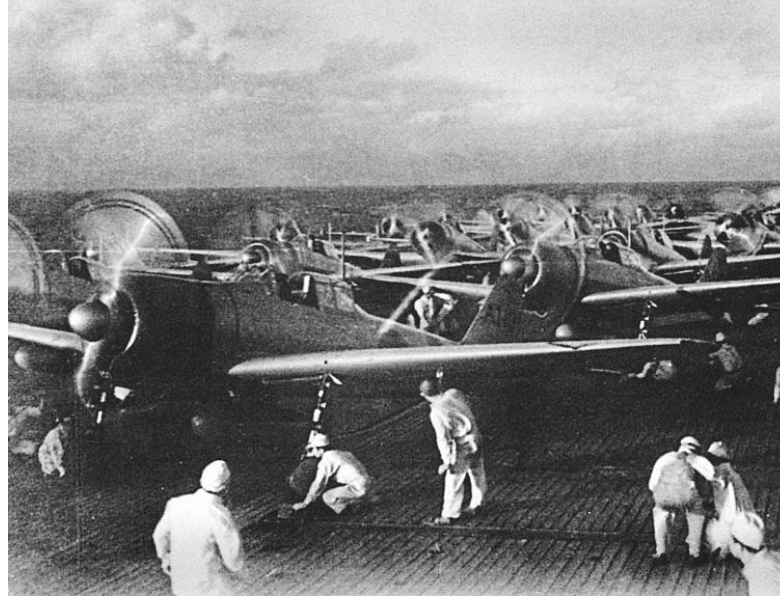
With Pearl Harbor sitting at the south of Oahu and Japan's aircraft approaching from the north to avoid US patrol planes, it meant navigating Hawaii's terrain at low altitudes. This shot of Ford Island (looking north) with mountains and rolling clouds in the background shows what the pilots would have to contend with, and only when they broke through those clouds would they know whether their mission had maintained its element of surprise. ☹



Aircraft prepare to depart from the carrier *Shokaku*, while a Kate torpedo bomber is shown taking off. ☹



Japanese carrier pilots receive their final instructions ahead of the launch. ☉



Dive bombers from Akagi are readied for the mission ahead. ☉

Such were the efforts to maintain secrecy that only at this point were those on board given information on the nature of the mission. As the fleet moved east it was aided in its efforts to avoid detection from the sporadic US patrol planes by low cloud cover, but that brought poor weather with it and storms about 1000 miles from Hawaii had left the ships scattered across hundreds of miles of open water. In a remarkable feat of navigation, the fleet regrouped using just short-range, low-power radio.

From December 4-6, the news already having been delivered from Chief of Staff Nagano that Japan had decided to open hostilities against the United States, the strike force moved south and by the early hours of December 7 had reached a staging point just a few hundred miles north of Oahu ready to unleash the greatest concentration of naval air power ever assembled on Pearl Harbor. At 6.10am, the first wave of 183 aircraft took off from the decks of the six carriers – the incredible flock of fighters, level bombers and dive bombers launching into the Pacific skies surely ranking as one of the greatest spectacles in the history of aviation warfare – and they were just 132 miles away from their target when they were first spotted on radar.

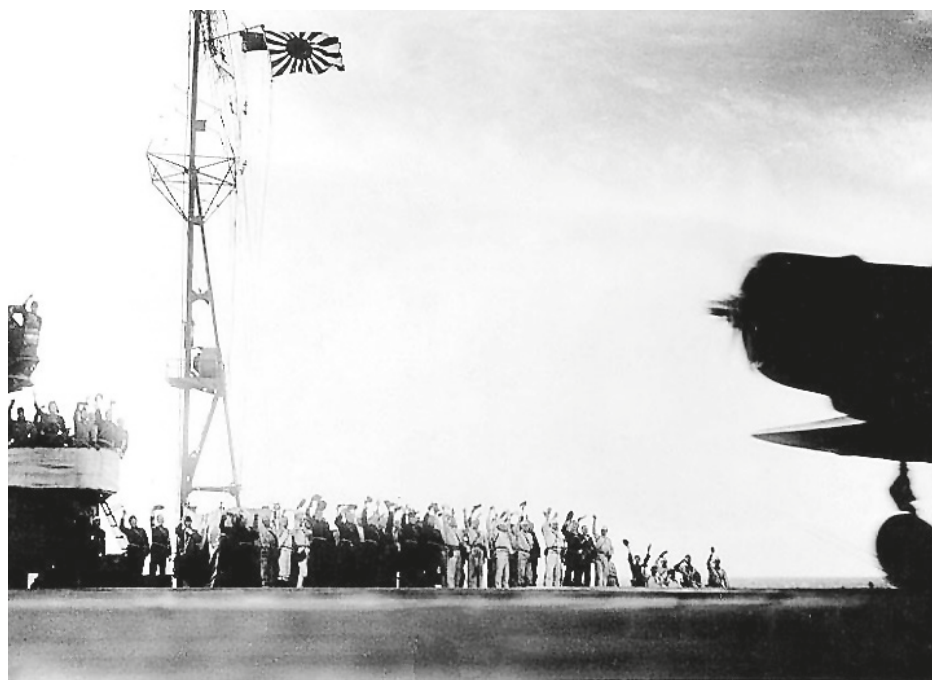
Even then, such was the surprise factor they'd maintained that they were mistaken for a flight of American B-17 bombers which were due at Pearl Harbor that day and on approach at the time. It was only when first visual contact was made as the fighters screamed over the heads of unprepared residents of the Pearl Harbor bases that they had any notion of the impending devastation about to commence.

Devising the plan, training for it, launching it – everything had been executed to near-perfection, but perhaps the most amazing feat was that Yamamoto had managed to control the various strands of the Japanese military to ensure that the operation went exactly the way he wanted and remained a total surprise.

He had done all he could – now it was time for his strike force to launch into history and inflict as much damage on the mighty American fleet moored off the shores of Ford Island as possible.



A Japanese B5N Kate torpedo bomber crew on board the carrier Kaga on December 6, 1941. ☉



Japanese crews cheer on the deck of Shokaku as a B5N Kate bomber prepares for launch. ☉

The Pacific War begins

When the planes of the Japanese first wave arrived to commence their attack, commander of the air forces Mitsuo Fuchida ordered his telegraph operator to tap out “to, to, to” – the code for “attack”. This was swiftly followed by “to ra, to ra, to ra” meaning “attack, surprise achieved”.

Little could the pilots know, however, that although their approach to Oahu caught those at Pearl Harbor unaware, the first American shots of the Pacific War had already been fired by crew members of the Wickes-class destroyer USS *Ward*. In the calm waters around the island at 3.57am,

Ward was notified of a periscope sighting by the minesweeper USS *Condor* and she steamed out to investigate. An initial sweep found nothing untoward but then came a second sighting, this time from cargo ship USS *Antares*, whose crew radioed that they were being tailed by a non-American vessel that they likened to a mini-submarine.

The midget sub was part of the Japanese strike force, and had been dispatched to guard the entrance to Pearl Harbor and use one of the two torpedoes aboard to destroy any ships attempting to escape the air attack which was just hours away.

Such a submarine had never been seen by the crew of the *Ward* before but, following protocol despite not being totally sure what they were attacking, they duly closed in and fired guns one and three, scoring a hit with the second salvo – following that with the dropping of depth charges. News of the skirmish – which, as it turned out, was the opening act of direct American involvement in the Second World War – reached the head of the Pacific Fleet, Admiral Husband Kimmel, at the same time as the first reports of enemy planes appearing in the skies above Pearl Harbor.

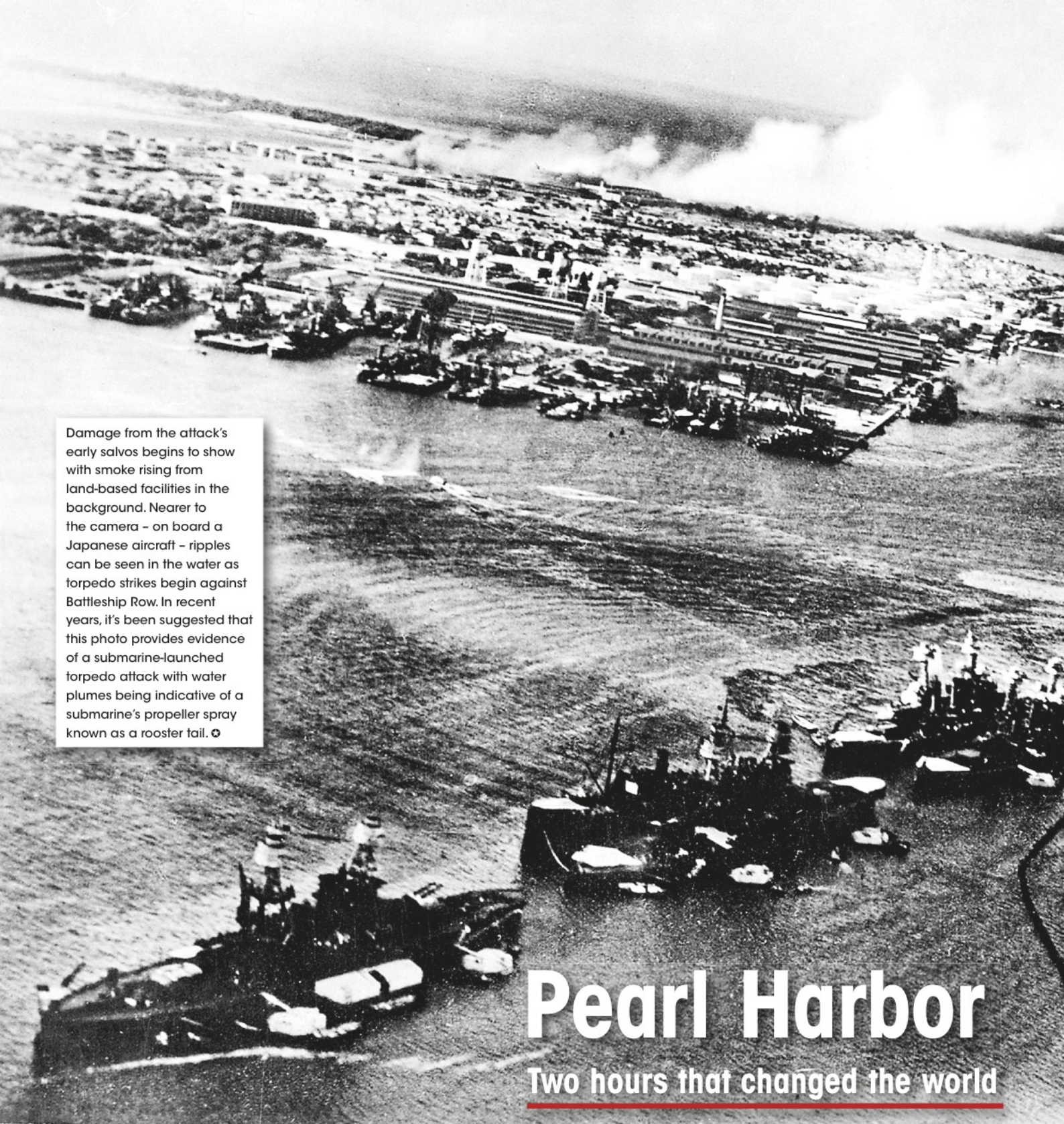




The St Paul gun crew of the USS *Ward* alongside the weapon that fired America's first shots of the Pacific War. ☪



Those shots were fired against a Japanese submarine like this one which grounded at Waimanalo Beach - some 30 miles from Pearl Harbor - on December 8. One of its two crewmembers, Kazuo Sakamaki, became America's first Japanese prisoner of war. ☪

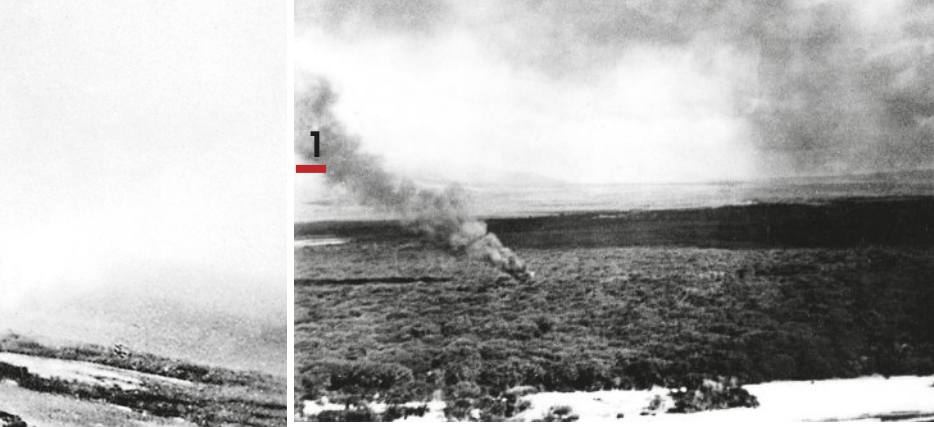


Damage from the attack's early salvos begins to show with smoke rising from land-based facilities in the background. Nearer to the camera - on board a Japanese aircraft - ripples can be seen in the water as torpedo strikes begin against Battleship Row. In recent years, it's been suggested that this photo provides evidence of a submarine-launched torpedo attack with water plumes being indicative of a submarine's propeller spray known as a rooster tail. 🐓

Pearl Harbor

Two hours that changed the world

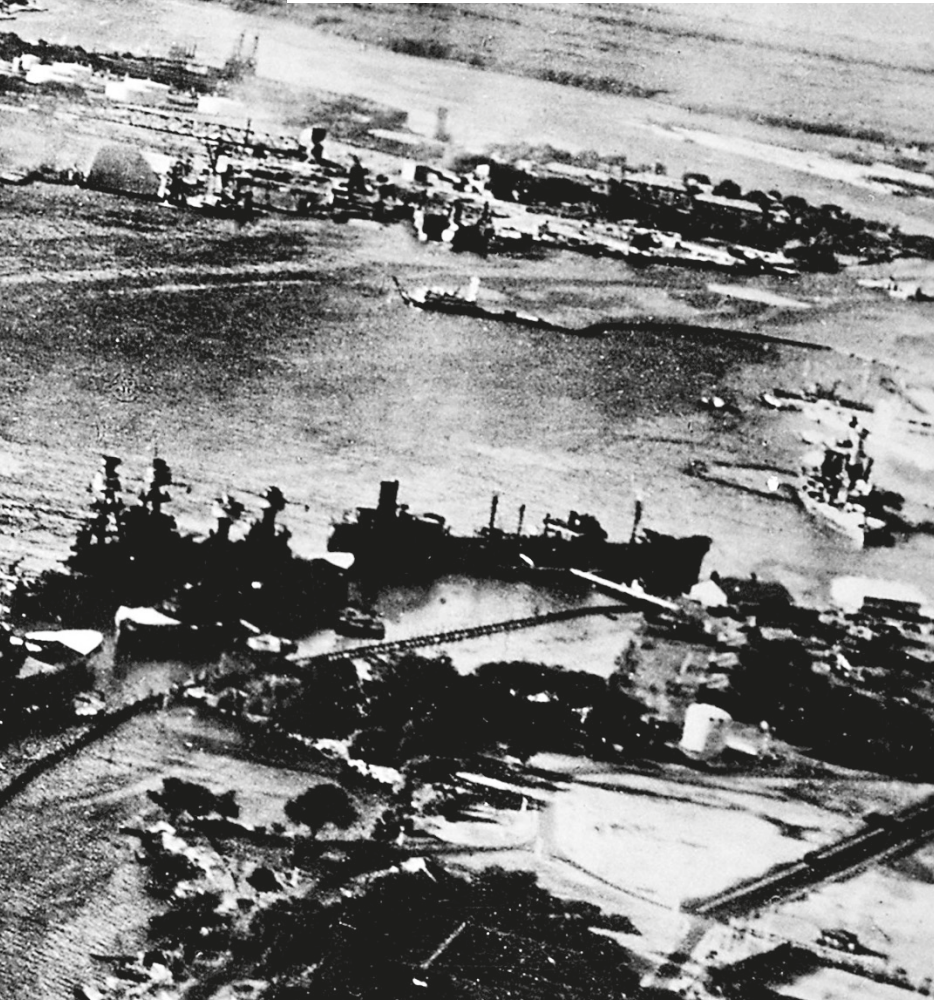




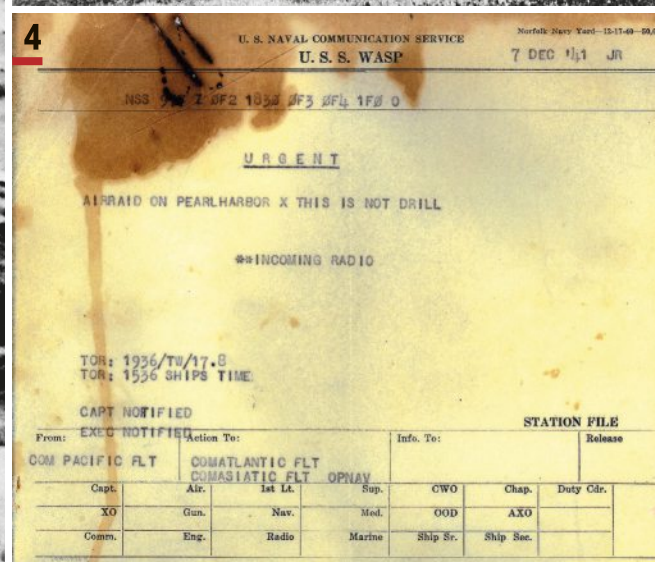
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1. A Zero fighter stalks its defeated prey - a shot-down US fighter - near Oahu's Ewa Marine Corps Air Station. ☸
2. The initial aim of the Japanese attack was to prevent American aircraft from taking to the skies and launching counteroffensives. A Marine SNB Expeditor is shown burning as a result of the first-wave efforts. ☸
3. The US Army B-17E of First Lieutenant Karl T Barthelmess after landing safely near Hickam Field. His aircraft was part of a fleet of 16 bombers heading for the Philippines that arrived at Pearl Harbor for refuelling at the same time as Japanese planes were patrolling the skies. Twelve of the aircraft did attempt to touch down, and all but one were successful despite coming under heavy fire. ☸
4. The radio message sent by Ford Island Command Center. This example was received by aircraft carrier USS *Wasp* of the Atlantic Fleet. ☸
5. US Navy personnel attempt to save a burning PBV Catalina aircraft at Naval Air Station Kaneohe, east of Pearl Harbor. ☸
6. P-40 fighter planes and aircraft hangars burn at Wheeler Field. ☸

0745 |

The Japanese air attack on Pearl Harbor begins as dive bombers and fighters swarm over Wheeler Field - north of Pearl Harbor - and Hickam Field, plus the naval air station on Ford Island. The first wave aims to neutralise US aircraft, ensuring there is no chance of forces mounting a defence. With aircraft parked wingtip-to-wingtip for security, they make easy targets and significant damage is inflicted in the opening minutes of assault.

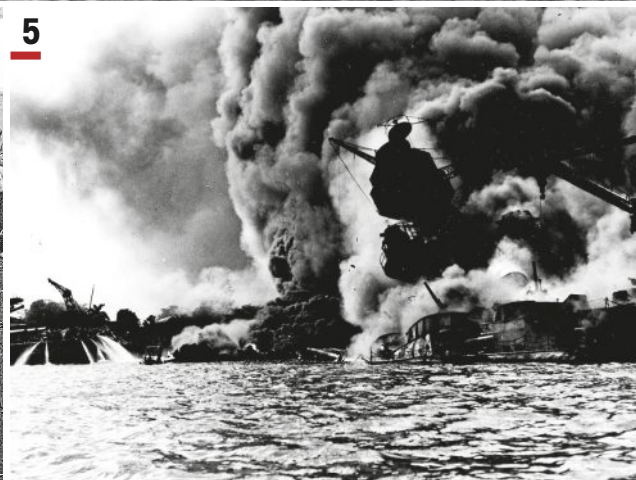
0758 |

Commander Logan C Ramsey spots a low-flying plane from Ford Island Command Center and, once he realises it's not a showboating US pilot, he orders telegraph operators to alert every ship and base with the message: "AIR RAID ON PEARL HARBOR X THIS IS NOT DRILL". Sailors and airmen, many having stumbled out of bed into the ensuing chaos, rush to their battle positions in a valiant attempt to defend Battleship Row.

0800 |

With Japanese pilots following their carefully constructed plan, the majority of American planes are unable to get off the ground - and the ones that do are quickly shot down. It leaves the skies clear for torpedo and level bombers to target the seven vessels lined up on Battleship Row and they enjoy almost instant success as an armour-piercing bomb strikes America's premier battleship USS *Arizona*, setting off more than a million pounds of explosives on board. The resulting fireball devastates the ship and within minutes she's on the bottom of the harbour. USS *West Virginia* is also hit during the initial onslaught but, with at least two bombs and seven torpedoes blowing gaping holes in her port side, it's impossible to pinpoint exactly when the damage was done.

A photographer captures the moment ammunition on the USS Arizona dramatically explodes, having been struck by an armour-piercing bomb. Ⓢ

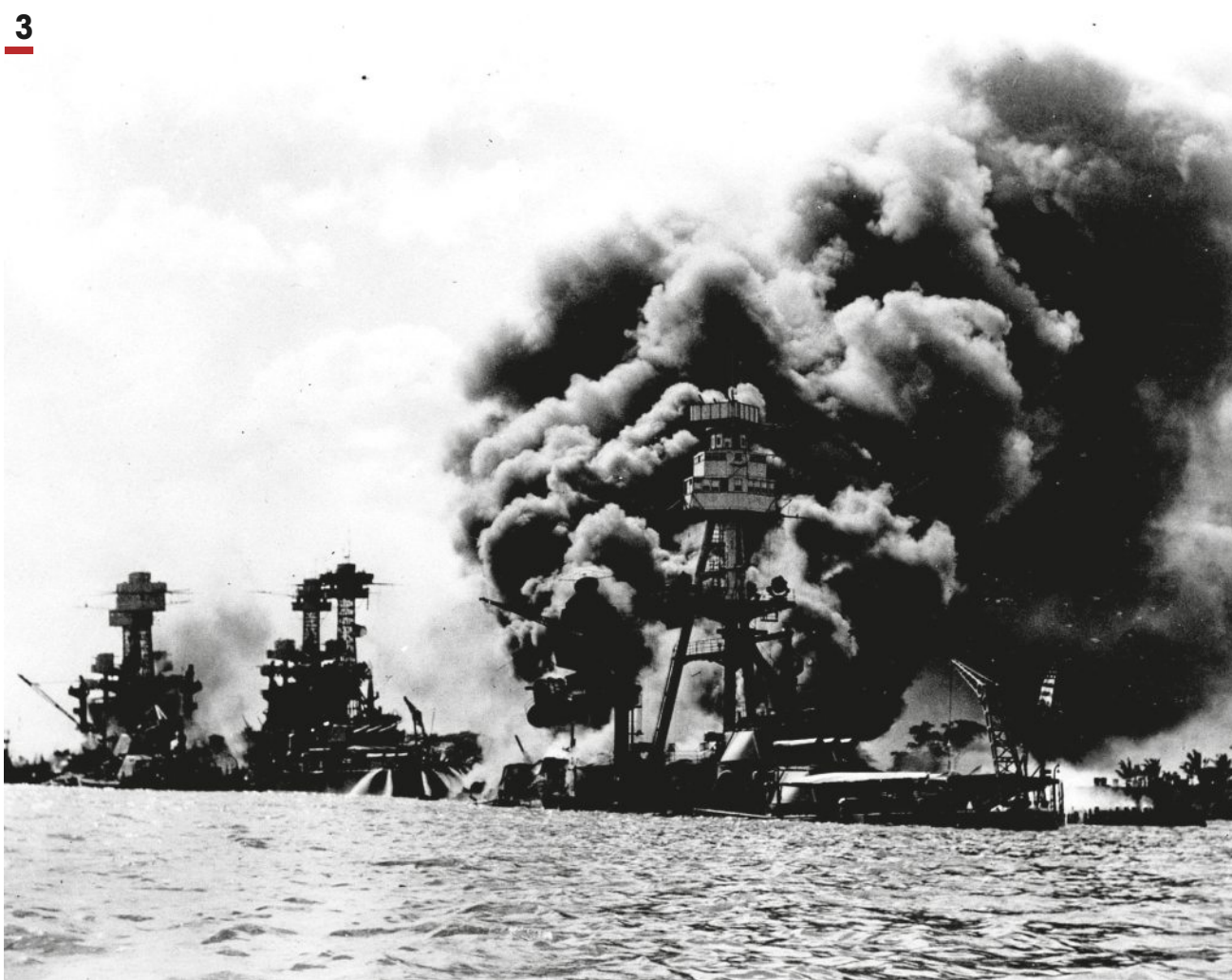




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1. A PB4Y patrol bomber ablaze at Kaneohe. ☹
2. US gunners pepper the skies above Ford Island with anti-aircraft fire and flak, but it does little to prevent Japan's carefully planned and executed assault. ☹
3. Bombardment of Battleship Row continues. ☹
4. Sailors at Naval Air Station Ford Island reload ammunition clips and belts between the Japanese attack waves. ☹
5. The stricken *Arizona* is engulfed by smoke and flames which are visible for miles around. ☹
6. Thick smoke, fuelled by escaping oil, dominates the horizon as US personnel look down the channel on Battleship Row. A listing *USS California* and capsized *USS Oklahoma* are visible. ☹

0801 |

A young Japanese pilot and his wingman approach Pearl Harbor from the northwest, and they mistake auxiliary ship *USS Utah* for an American aircraft carrier. Two crews release torpedoes, and the significant strikes cause *Utah* to capsize.

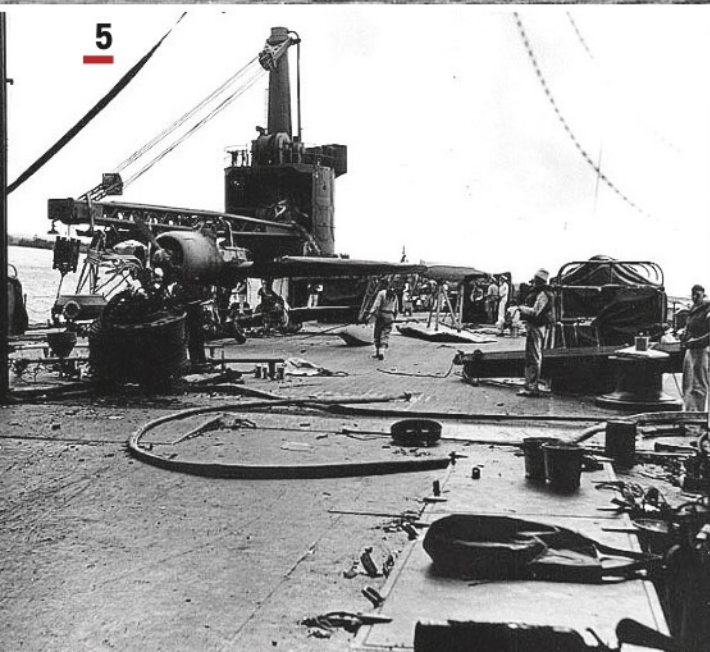
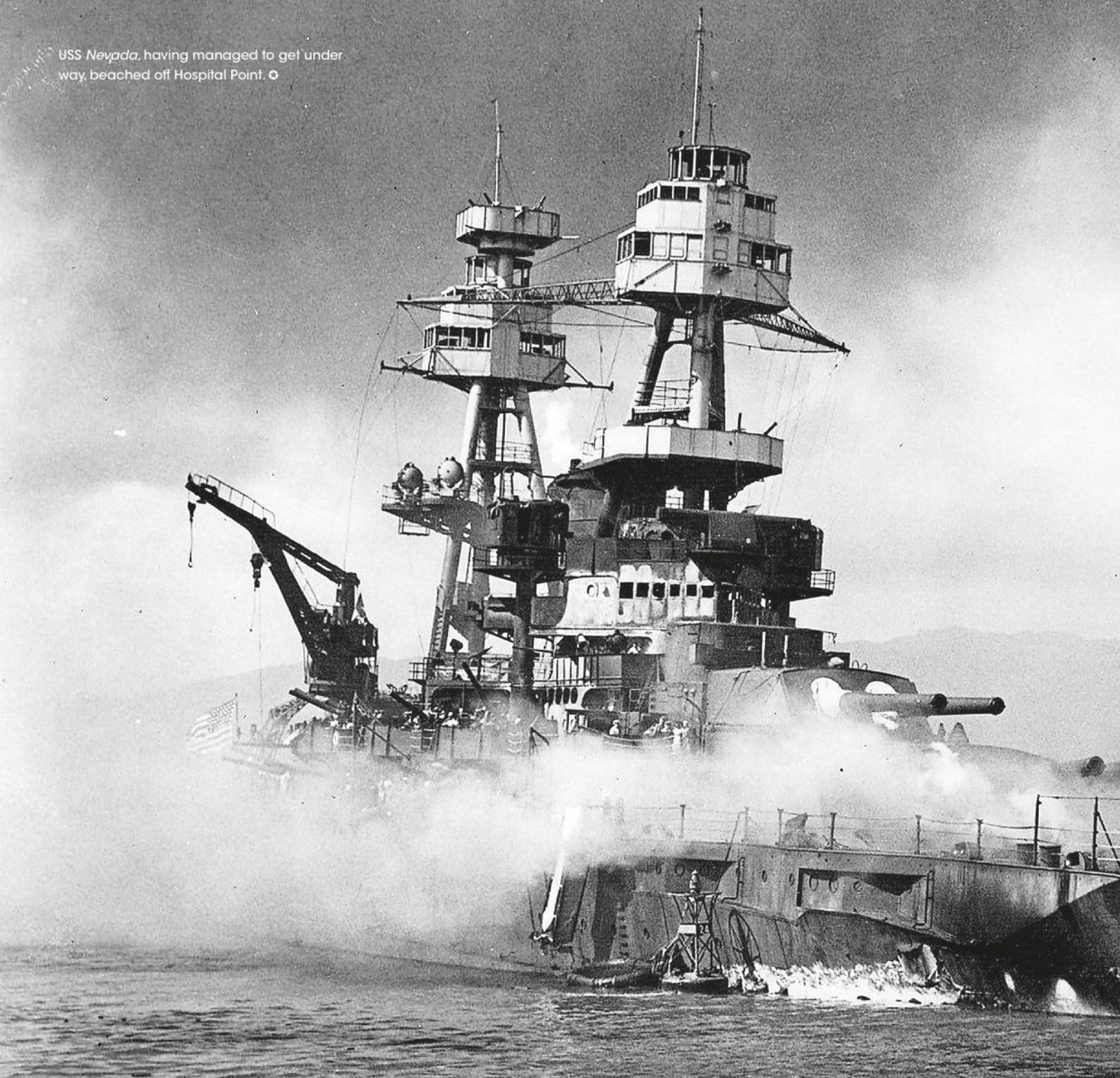
0815 |

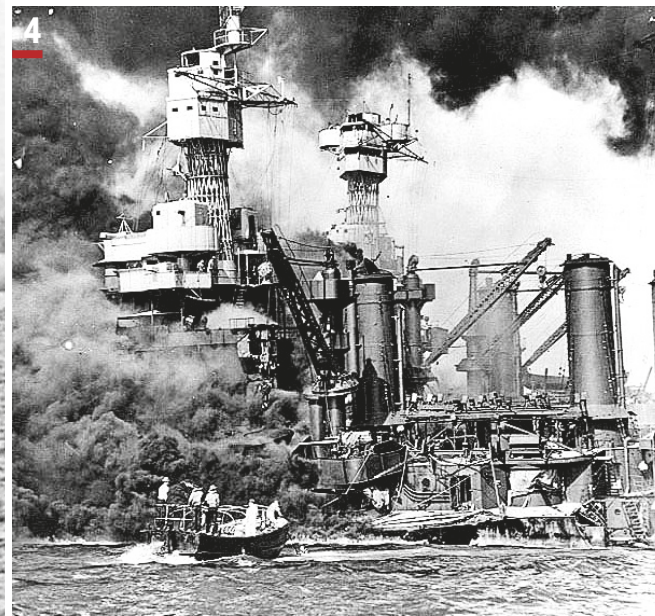
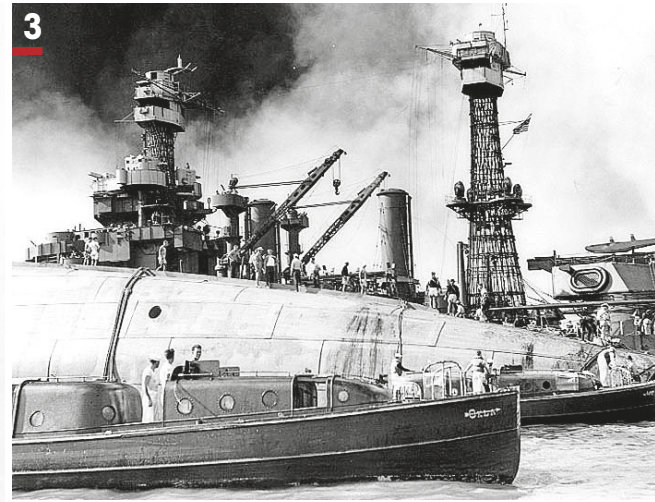
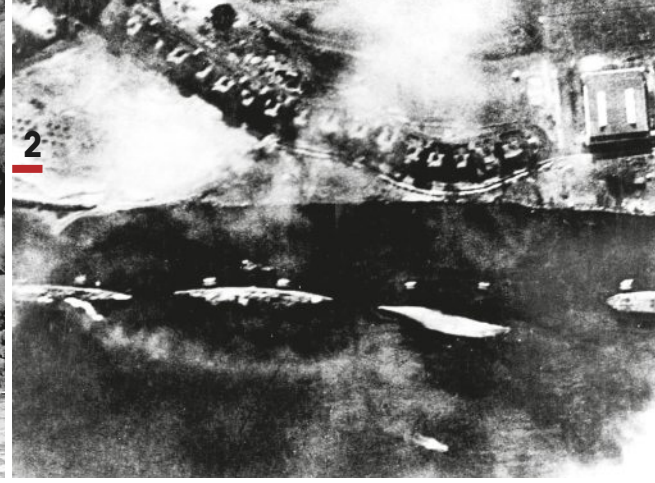
USS Oklahoma - positioned outboard of *USS Maryland* on Battleship Row and so bearing the brunt of Japan's overwhelming force - is another victim of the attack, and after at least five torpedo strikes the ship completely capsizes. US servicemen scramble to her upturned hull in a bid to cut out survivors - several are released, but many more are trapped below. Across the channel at the dry dock, *USS Helena* and *USS Oglala* are occupying the usual berth of battleship *USS Pennsylvania* and so are attacked by torpedo bombers.

0820 |

Already suffering "far reaching and disastrous" consequences as the result of three near-simultaneous torpedo strikes, an explosion rocks *USS California*, causing widespread flooding and fuel leaks on board the battleship. A further bomb attack causes a fire, which would take days to fully extinguish.

USS Nevada, having managed to get under way, beached off Hospital Point. ☉





1. The scale of devastation is unprecedented, as battleship after battleship is wrecked by the Japanese onslaught. ☹
2. A Japanese aerial photograph shows the overturned USS *Utah* that had been mistaken for an American aircraft carrier. ☹
3. On the upturned hull of the *Oklahoma*, rescuers simultaneously attempt to free trapped sailors while making initial attempts to salvage the sunken battleship. ☹
4. Sailors in a motor launch pick up survivors who've been thrown into the water near the burning wreck of USS *West Virginia*, while others still aboard the ship work to save her. ☹
5. A burnt-out OS2U-2 floatplane sits among the debris on board seaplane tender USS *Curtiss* after a shot-down Japanese fighter smashed into her deck. ☹
6. USS *Raleigh* is kept afloat by barges after suffering torpedo and bomb damage. The capsized hull of USS *Utah* is visible behind. ☹

0840 |

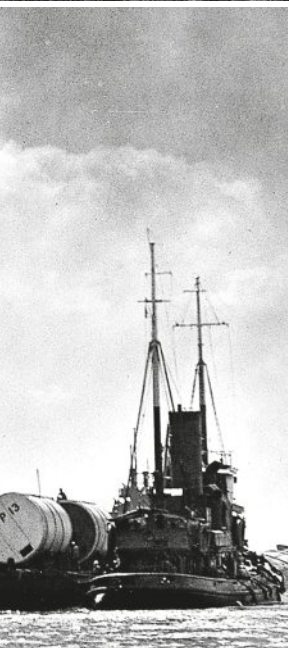
Comprising 54 bombers, 78 dive bombers and 35 fighters, the second wave of Japanese planes arrives over the Pearl Harbor skyline.

0850 |

Among the bullets, bombs and torpedoes, USS *Nevada* attempts to head for the open sea but aircraft of the second wave bomb her. Rather than risk sinking in the narrow channel, the crew deliberately ground her off Hospital Point.

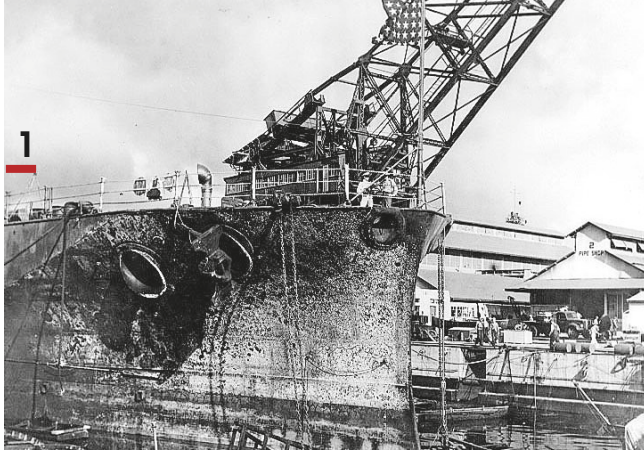
0854 |

Some US anti-aircraft gunners mount successful counter attacks against Japanese forces, but the second wave still manages to target the Pearl Harbor dry dock where USS *Pennsylvania* suffers repeated hits, as do destroyers USS *Cassin* and USS *Downes*.



The wrecks of destroyers USS *Downes* and USS *Cassin* in Pearl Harbor's dry dock. *Pennsylvania* sits just behind, with the burning *Arizona* further back still. ☪





1. Blistered paint and other fire damage suffered by USS *Pennsylvania*, which is a sitting target, being in dry dock. ☹
2. A stunning photograph captures the moment that the forward magazine of USS *Shaw* explodes, throwing debris into the air which would land up to half a mile away. ☹
3. Pearl Harbor viewed from Pier 1010: USS *Oglala* capsized in the foreground, USS *Helena* further down and *Shaw* burning in the background (right). ☹
4. After a brief moment of respite on Ford Island, the sailors are shocked back into action by the huge explosion on board *Shaw*. ☹
5. Smoke billows from *Shaw* behind the beached *Nevada*. ☹
6. The view from afar: *Arizona* and other ships burn in the distance as America starts the process of coming to terms with what has happened in Hawaii. ☹

0900 |

Having been occupied by reported submarine sightings, modern seaplane tender USS *Curtiss* turns her attention to anti-aircraft operations and manages to score a hit, only for the enemy plane to smash into her and ignite fires on board. Shortly after, a dive bomber drops its payload into the already damaged deck, setting the main hangar ablaze.

0930 |

Struggling to navigate the smoke pouring from the damaged ships and having to contend with anti-aircraft fire, the pilots of the second wave aren't able to inflict the same punishment as the first, but still manage to hit USS *Shaw*. A large fire rages through the ship, eventually sparking an explosion in the forward magazine - the incredible force separating the bow from the rest of the vessel and sending tons of debris into the air. Back on Battleship Row, USS *Tennessee* prepares to get under way, but is trapped among the burning wrecks of her fellow capital ships.

0945 |

With Battleship Row in flames and destruction spread far and wide across Pearl Harbor, Japanese fighters and bombers head back to the carrier fleet north of Oahu bringing to an end one of the most deadly and daring military operations to ever be conceived and executed.



The wreckage of a Japanese Zero fighter having crashed into a building at Fort Kamehameha – a military installation near Honolulu. ☹



A US Marine Corps sergeant at a medical dispensary the day after Japan's offensive. ☹



US Army airmen assess bomb damage at hangars on Hickam Field. ☹



While the majority of American deaths at Pearl Harbor would be military personnel, civilians were also killed during the onslaught. ☹



Bullet-ridden and burnt-out cars next to a hangar at Kaneohe. ☹



US Marines fire rifles in salute of 15 officers killed at Kaneohe during the Pearl Harbor attack. ☹



A dead US Navy sailor washes ashore at Kaneohe. ☹

The aftermath

Confrontation between America and Japan had been brewing for years, decades – perhaps even more than half a century – yet when it finally arrived it was swift and decisive. In just two hours of blistering devastation, damage had been done that would claim the lives of 2403 Americans and leave thousands more with physical and mental wounds from which they would never recover. It was, and would remain until the terrorist attacks of September 11, the most deadly act of foreign aggression on US soil and sent shockwaves through the country that still reverberate today.

In the minutes and hours immediately following the attack, medical personnel were left desperately battling to save the lives of injured sailors and civilians – faced with the impossible situation of having to prioritise the lives of those they thought they could save over those who stood no chance of recovery. Away from the makeshift hospitals and operating theatres which had been erected to cope with the influx of patients, rescue operations continued out in the harbour as it became clear that many men had been trapped alive in the capsized or sunken ships.

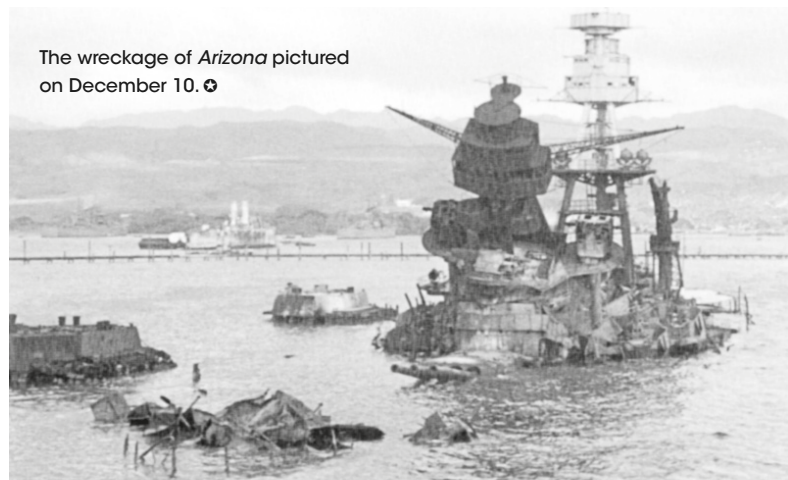
Many were cut free, but despite the banging of metal being heard for days after, many more were unreachable and would be entombed in the masses of mangled ships. While the search for survivors took place, experienced commanders and officers of the US Navy acted on years of training to begin the process of salvaging the ruined vessels – many of them realising that in the shallow waters of the harbour the blows the mighty battleships had sustained didn't necessarily have to be fatal.

With the chaos ensuing in Oahu, word of the attack began to filter back to the American mainland – mainly through news radio broadcasts – where it was met with a combination of anger and resolve.

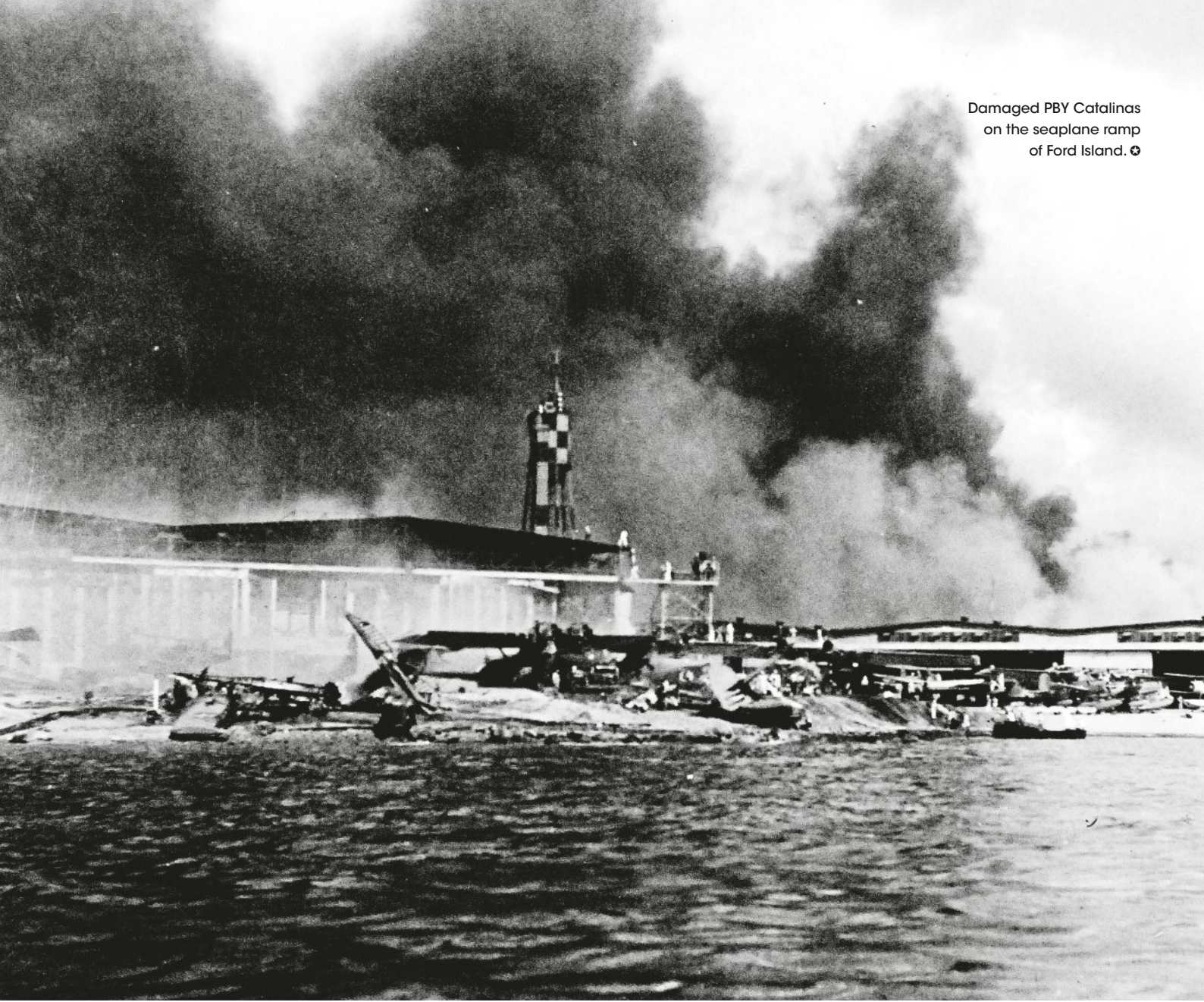
The following morning President Roosevelt made his way to Capitol Hill to deliver a speech to a joint session of the US Congress where he requested that the legislative branch formally vote to declare war on the assailants of the Pearl Harbor attack. It was during the address that he delivered what has become one of the most recognisable pieces of American rhetoric when he declared in his opening line that December 7, 1941, would be a “date which will live in infamy”.

His seven-minute statement was a masterpiece of political oratory, and it had the desired effect of galvanising US public opinion behind a war that, for so long, it had been against. It seemed, initially at least, that Japan's aim of demoralising America to such an extent that it folded tamely in the face of aggression had been unsuccessful – and time would prove that this particular misjudgment was not the only one made by its military and ministerial power figures.

What Japan had achieved, however, was a stunning and categorical victory in what was the first major battle or skirmish of the Pacific War. Its aim of creating the breathing space needed for its Southeast Asia operation had also been emphatically achieved, and US forces were able to mount little in the way of defence as the Empire of Japan spent the following six months sweeping through its desired territories and occupying them with relative ease.



The wreckage of *Arizona* pictured on December 10. ☹



Damaged PBY Catalinas on the seaplane ramp of Ford Island. 🌐



President Roosevelt delivers his 'Infamy Speech' to a joint session of the US Congress. 🌐