

One of the defining images of the 20th century is the horrifying moment when the battleship USS *Arizona* exploded in a cataclysmic fireball at 8:10 AM on Sunday, December 7, 1941. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor catapulted the United States into the most destructive war in human history.

Nearly every American who is old enough can remember where they were and what they were doing on December 7. But there were thousands of young men whose lives and destinies were forever changed in those hours as the Japanese planes tore into the heart of the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

Today the number of men, survivors who served on the ships moored along Ford Island's famous Battleship Row is dwindling. Old men now, they are white haired with slow movements and shuffling feet, but their minds, filled with visions of an apocalypse they never imagined, are as sharp as ever.

On that peaceful Sunday morning nearly the entire fleet was in port. The battleship *California* was moored far ahead of the paired *Maryland* and *Oklahoma*, *Tennessee*

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and *West Virginia*, *Arizona* and the repair ship *Vestal*, and the lone *Nevada*. *Pennsylvania* was in drydock at the Navy Yard near the destroyers *Cassin* and *Downes* and the minelayer *Oglala*. More destroyers and submarines were tied to piers past the Navy Yard.

The target ship *Utah* and cruisers *Helena*, *Honolulu*, *Detroit*, and *Raleigh* were on the west side of Ford Island. All in all, more than 90 vessels were in Pearl Harbor that morning.

At 7:55 AM the roar of aircraft engines shattered the early morning air. The first attack by 183 bombers and fighters was carefully planned to close in from all directions in a deadly inescapable web of destruction.

The Japanese aircraft carrier *Akagi*'s 1st VT Squadron's 12 Nakajima B5N "Kate" torpedo bombers, led by Lt. Cmdr. Shigeharu Murata, swept in a turn from the southeast to line up on the oblivious ships of Battleship Row. Behind them were 12 more from the carrier *Kaga*. Sixteen Kates from the carriers *Hiryu* and *Soryu* came in from the southwest toward the west side of Ford Island. Each carried a 1,870-pound Type 91 torpedo, specially modified to run in the shallow waters of the harbor. They were also fitted with two warheads to defeat the battleships' armor belt.

## Survivors remember the infamous attack on Pearl Harbor.

BY MARK CARLSON

This harrowing photograph of Battleship Row under attack on the morning of December 7, 1941, was taken from a Japanese plane. Adjacent to Ford Island in Pearl Harbor lies the battleship USS *Nevada* at left, while the USS *Arizona* belches smoke and flame to the right. Outboard of the *Arizona* is the repair ship USS *Vestal*. Continuing left to right, the USS *West Virginia* is outboard of the USS *Tennessee* while the capsized USS *Oklahoma* sits outboard of the USS *Maryland*. ABOVE: A Japanese Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighter fitted with an external fuel tank takes off from the flight deck of the aircraft carrier *Akagi* on the morning of December 7, 1941.

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*Visions* FROM  
**Battleship Row**

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**ABOVE:** Frantically working to cut through the hull and reach sailors trapped inside the capsized battleship USS *Oklahoma*, men employ blowtorches and listen for the tapping of distress signals. The effort to reach the trapped sailors went on for several days. **BELOW, left to right:** Seaman 1st Class Stuart Hedley, Radioman John Murphy, Seaman 2nd Class Jack Evans, and Yeoman 1st Class Raymond Richmond were eyewitnesses to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.



Far overhead, 30 Kate level bombers from the *Akagi* and *Kaga* put their crosshairs on the scrubbed teak decks of America's vaunted battle fleet. Under the fuselages of the Kates were 1,700-pound Type 99 armor-piercing bombs modified from 16-inch naval shells.

Lieutenant Commander Kakuichi Takahashi's 27 Aichi D3A1 "Val" dive bombers from the carrier *Shokaku* attacked the Ford Island Naval Air Station and Hickam Army Air Field with 550-pound Type 98 general-purpose bombs. Another 27 dive bombers from the carrier *Zuikaku* went after Wheeler Airfield and Schofield Barracks. Forty-four Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighters provided an air umbrella for the attacking bombers.

None of the American sailors, Marines, soldiers, or airmen knew they were about to go to war. The *Vestal* was tied up on *Arizona*'s port side. "We were there to do some work on her," said Radioman John Murphy of Oxnard, California. "I was coming off my watch, but wanted something to do. The officer of the deck

suggested I go 'next door' to the *Arizona* and make a mail run. I had to wait for the OOD (officer of the day) to sign the weather report before I could go over. The sky was clear and quiet. Nothing was happening."

The *Nevada* was tied up aft of the *Arizona*. Her band was just finishing Morning Colors when the Kates bore in and released their torpedoes.

*Oklahoma* was outboard of *Maryland*. "I was going to go ashore on liberty and was in the shower," said Yeoman First Class Ray Richmond. "Suddenly it felt as if someone had picked up the ship, shook it, and dropped it. I hit the overhead."

Thinking of the Army's habit of dropping sandbags on ships for practice, he thought. "Oh, those Army planes are dropping really big sandbags on us."

"But then," he continued, "the ship shuddered again, and I heard the general alarm and bolted for the door. I was naked as a jaybird, but I went to my battle station on Number 5

Port 5-inch, 51-caliber gun." Richmond felt the huge battleship start to heel over to port from three torpedo hits. "Then the lights went out."

John Murphy was waiting for the OOD on *Vestal*. "We saw these planes coming in low," he recalled. "One man said, 'Why is the Army practicing on Sunday morning? Then the bombs began falling. I ran to the radio room and got to work. One of the first messages I picked up was 'Air Raid Pearl Harbor. This is not a drill!' No kidding, I thought."

*Vestal* took two hits. "One bomb hit the crew's mess and the other scored a hit where we stored the steel plate," remembered Murphy. "If that steel hadn't been there, the armor-piercing bomb would have gone right through the bottom of the ship."

At berth F-6 astern of *Oklahoma* at the very center of Battleship Row was USS *West Virginia*. Known with affection to her crew as the "Wee Vee," her distinctive cage masts and those of the USS *Tennessee* stood out clearly against the early morning sky.

In *West Virginia*'s Quartermaster berth was Seaman First Class Stuart Hedley of West Palm Beach, Florida. He related, "I was in my dress blues and looking forward to going ashore to a picnic. Then the P.A. called out, 'Away all fire and rescue crews! Then the bugler, that would have been Marine Corporal Richard Fisk, blew the General Alarm. I ran up five decks to my quarters to grab my hat, and a bos'n's mate kicked me in the seat of the pants and yelled, 'Get to your battle stations on the double! This is the real thing!'"

Upon reaching the main deck Hedley saw planes coming in from all directions. "I saw a torpedo plane going over us, and the pilot was laughing like anything."

The 33,500-ton battleship was hit by seven torpedoes in all, causing the ship to heave as Hedley climbed up the ladder into the bottom of Number 3 turret, just aft of the superstructure. On top of the turret was a catapult and two Vought OS2U Kingfisher floatplanes. "I climbed into the turret," recalled Hedley. "I was at the pointer station of the port 16-inch gun while my friend Crosslin was at the gun trainer's seat. There was a bulkhead between us and the starboard gun compartment. A small hatch down near the deck was dogged down tight."

Aboard the *Tennessee*, 17-year-old Seaman Second Class Jack Evans of Corcoran, California, was on duty. "On Friday we had been told we would be getting an inspection by Rear Admiral Isaac Kidd (commander of Battleship Division 1) on Monday. So we polished all the brightwork and locked the ammunition for the

**“I was looking forward when the *Arizona* blew up. I hung on because the explosion made the mast whip back and forth in the hot blast and I thought it would snap. When I looked back the *Arizona* was about 20 feet out of the water. Then her keel broke in to and she sank.**

—Jack Evans, aboard the *Tennessee*



deck guns away in the magazines. I had just finished my cleaning station and was in the uniform of the day, white shorts, black socks and shoes, white pullover and cap. I was standing in our living space in the forward battle dressing station when General Quarters sounded. One of my mates said, ‘This is a helluva note for the ship to hold a drill in port on Sunday morning.’ Then a bos’n’s mate said, ‘This is no drill!’ When I reached the main deck, I saw Ford Island totally wrecked. Zeros were strafing the planes and a hangar had its door hanging off. I could see we were in trouble.”

*Nevada*’s crew scattered to its battle stations when the bombs and torpedoes came in. Down in her crew’s quarters was Woodrow “Woody” Derby of South Dakota. “I was in my bunk, reading. A few minutes before 0800 the alarm sounded. I went to my battle station in the magazines for the broadside guns. We were all down there and on alert. I couldn’t see a damn thing.”

Two of the battleship’s boilers were still on line. Just after 8:05, a Kate dropped a torpedo that struck her port side, causing some flood-

ing. “I felt the ship shuddering from the guns up on deck,” said Derby. “There was one big lurch, and we looked around, but none of us knew we’d been hit by a torpedo.”

Jack Evans climbed the ladder on the outside of *Tennessee*’s foremast. “There were about eight of us in the foretop,” he said. “The foretop was like a metal bucket with a roof and a waist-high metal shield. We were about 122 feet off the water and could see everything. My job was to report aircraft to the fire control center phone talker. I saw plenty. I looked north toward the center of the island and watched the smoke rising from Wheeler Field and Schofield Barracks. To the east past the *West Virginia* and *Oklahoma* a really big column of smoke was rising over Hickam. I saw this one plane with fixed landing gear fly right over our bow. The man in the rear seat looked at me. If I’d had a potato I could have hit him.”

*Oklahoma* was listing heavily to port, and *West Virginia*’s entire port side was a mass of smoke and boiling water from the torpedo hits. The Kates and Vals continued their deadly dance. *Nevada*’s captain ordered the engine

**This startling color still frame from a film reel captures the moment the catastrophic explosion doomed the battleship USS *Arizona*. A Japanese bomb fashioned from a modified artillery shell detonated a forward powder magazine and caused the devastating explosion that killed 1,177 Americans.**

room to prepare to get underway. He wanted to clear the harbor and have room to maneuver.

In *Vestal*’s radio room John Murphy was busy intercepting and passing on the scores of frantic radio messages filling the airways. “Another man came in and slammed the hatchway shut and dogged it tight,” he remembered. “It was on the side facing the *Arizona*.”

*Arizona* had been hit with one bomb on her afterdeck, but worse was yet to come.

The pilot of a Kate bomber flying at 1,500 feet dropped an armor-piercing bomb on *Arizona*’s starboard forecastle. What happened next was seen by virtually everybody in the area. The bomb impacted just forward of the second turret and plunged through several decks down to the space between Number 1 and Number 2 Handling Rooms, igniting propellant for the forward guns in an incandescent

detonation that tore the heavy armored steel of the proud ship like tissue paper as it blew out her bottom.

Jack Evans was still in his lofty perch 120 feet over the water. "I was looking forward when the *Arizona* blew up. I hung on because the explosion made the mast whip back and forth in the hot blast, and I thought it would snap. When I looked back the *Arizona* was about 20 feet out of the water. Then her keel broke in two and she sank."

The wave created by the concussion lifted *Tennessee's* aft end several feet out of the water as an inferno of burning fuel oil enveloped her stern.

Murphy said, "Suddenly there was a huge roar outside, and our ship rolled way over. It sounded like the whole world had gone up. If that hatch hadn't been dogged down, everybody in the radio room would have been killed."

In *West Virginia's* Number 3 turret, Stu Hedley and Crosslin were listening to the sounds of battle. "Crosslin said, 'Stu, let's see what's happening out there,' and pulled the sight cap off the periscope. We both looked out, and bam! There went the *Arizona*. Over 30 bodies flew through the air. It was terrible to watch."

*Arizona* had turned into a twisted blazing funeral pyre for 1,177 officers and men.

Another bomb fell toward Hedley's turret. "It hit the wing of the OS2U floatplane on the catapult over the starboard gun," he said. "The admiral's plane next to it was blasted off the turret. The bomb came right through the five inches of steel into the starboard gun compartment. It didn't explode, but it hit the recoil cylinder on top of the gun. The burning fuel from the plane ignited the glycerin in the cylinder in a flash fire and killed 11 men."

The hatch between the two 16-inch guns was torn loose and flew past Hedley and Crosslin, slamming into the port bulkhead. "The blast threw us back eight feet into the elevating screw," Hedley recalled. "Crosslin said, 'Stu, let's get the hell out of here!'"

By this time *West Virginia* was listing at least 15 degrees to port. "We were on the port quarterdeck," Hedley continued, "and the water was up to my knees. We saw the *Oklahoma* capsize, and I was sure we were going to roll over."

Lieutenant C.V. Ricketts, a damage control officer, ordered the voids between the battleship's armor belt and hull flooded. This saved the *West Virginia* from the fate of the *Oklahoma*. She settled herself into the mud of the harbor bottom.

Jack Evans watched as a bomb struck the corner of *Tennessee's* Number 2 turret. Splinters from the blast mortally wounded Captain Mervyn Bennion of the *West Virginia* as he

directed the battle from his ship's flying bridge. Bennion died in the arms of Captain's Orderly Doris Miller, who would later be awarded the Navy Cross for heroism in defending the ship. Bennion's last words were "Abandon ship!" He posthumously received the Medal of Honor.

*Tennessee* was hit again. Hedley commented, "Another bomb hit Number 3 turret just at the hole where the gun comes through and killed about four men."

Meanwhile, Ray Richmond and his crewmates were struggling to climb out of the black prison of the *Oklahoma*, lying on her port side. She had initially been hit by three torpedoes, and two more struck as she rolled over. "I was feeling my way along in the dark and finally reached a room with a deck hatch," he said. "Sailors were being pulled up by hands reaching down through the hatch. I looked up and realized they were of Commander Kenworthy, the captain, and the executive officer, Lieutenant Commander Hubbard. But I was too short to reach them, and they suggested I go out through the casemate of the nearest 5-inch gun."

Richmond found himself looking down at the water, 20 feet below. "The water between us and the *Maryland* was burning, filled with bodies and swimming men. The *Oklahoma* was almost upside down," he said.

Richmond realized he would have to jump far out to clear the armor blister at the waterline. He jumped as far as he could but hit hard on his lower back against the riveted steel. "I felt a shock of intense pain. I couldn't feel my legs, and I had to use my arms to scoot down

the hull. It was like thick metal shingles," he recalled. "Then I slid into the oily water and ducked under."

The *Maryland* was about 50 feet from *Oklahoma*. Richmond added, "As I swam I pushed bodies away from me and when I came up for air, I had to use my hands to clear a space of oil so I could get my head out and breathe."

More than 400 men were trapped in *Oklahoma's* hull. Richmond finally reached a rope ladder on the side of the battleship. "There were a bunch of men trying to get up that ladder, and they kept using my head for a step."

Near exhaustion, the sailor almost didn't make it up to the *Maryland's* deck. Richmond concluded, "Then a man reached down and pulled me up by my hair."

*Vestal's* commander, Captain Cassin Young, had been blown over the side into the water when the *Arizona* exploded. The executive officer, suddenly in nominal command, assessed the situation. The ship had taken two bomb hits and was right up against the burning battleship. The water was on fire, and hundreds of men were dead or dying. He ordered the crew to abandon ship. Murphy said, "Captain Young managed to climb back up a ladder to the deck. He countermanded the abandon ship order and got us underway and beached us on Area Landing."

On the *West Virginia* Hedley and Crosslin reached the starboard rail and looked at the spreading film of burning oil in the water between themselves and the *Tennessee*. "We were going to shinny over on one of the

**A U.S. Navy motor launch pulls sailors from the water in this colorized image of the stricken battleship USS *West Virginia*. Hit by several Japanese torpedoes, the *West Virginia* quickly settled to the bottom of Pearl Harbor in an upright orientation due to quick counterflooding to control the list from the torpedo strikes.**



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hawsers like the other boys were doing,' he said. "But then a Zero flew right between the *Wee Vee* and the *Tennessee*, machine gunning the boys out on the hawsers."

Hedley spotted the extended barrel of one of the 5-inch guns. "I asked Crosslin, 'Have you ever run down a railroad rail? You see those 5-inch guns? We're going to run across those barrels and jump down on the *Tennessee*. So we did. When we got there we were told to get to the beach. 'How?' I asked a chief petty officer. 'Swim, you idiot!' We stripped down and



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jumped into the water and swam underwater to the beach of Ford Island. Every time I came up to breathe I inhaled hot, burning air."

At 8:45 the second wave of bombers came in. Seventy Val dive bombers from *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Hiryu*, and *Soryu* had been ordered to hit the American carriers, but with none in port, concentrated their bombs on the remaining ships around Ford Island and the Navy Base. Twenty-seven Kates led by Lt. Cmdr. Shigekazu Shimazaki from *Shokaku* hit Kaneohe Naval Air Station on the east end of Oahu. *Zuikaku's* Kates, under Lt. Cmdr. Ichihara, returned to Hickam and Bellows Field and Ewa Marine Air Station.

"The dive bombers came in and put 14 bombs in the water on *Tennessee's* starboard side," Evans aboard the *Tennessee* said. "The Japs didn't hit the ship at all. But the bombs killed a lot of swimming men and destroyed all the ship's boats."

*Nevada* was underway and steering past the burning hulk of the *Arizona*, the sunken *West Virginia*, and the capsized *Oklahoma*. *Nevada*, the only moving ship, attracted the attention of the Vals of the second wave.

Wilson continued, "We were hit by three more bombs as we moved down toward the harbor mouth. I went on deck shortly after we got moving and just thought, 'Oh my God!' I was stunned about all those burning ships. The water was on fire, and the *Arizona* was just a big tower of fire and smoke. We were going to beach her at Hospital Point, but I guess it was



**ABOVE:** The battleship USS *Tennessee* is wedged against its mooring quays by the hull of the sunken USS *West Virginia*, which took several torpedo hits during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Engineers used dynamite to free the hull of the trapped *Tennessee*, which was repaired and modernized to later return to service. **BELOW:** The only capital ship of the U.S. Navy to get underway during the attack on Pearl Harbor, the battleship USS *Nevada* lies beached at Hospital Point and on fire after taking several bomb hits. The *Nevada* was repaired and returned to service, bombarding German shore installations during the D-Day landings in France. **LEFT:** A Japanese Aichi D3A Val dive bomber is seen in flight during the attack on Pearl Harbor. The Val is easily identified with its fixed landing gear. The aircraft was the frontline Japanese carrier-based dive bomber for much of World War II.



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not a good place to be, so the harbor tugs pulled us over to the opposite bank and we settled into the shallow water."

Evans watched *Nevada* go by from *Tennessee's* foretop. "The only big ship moving was the *Nevada*. She was low in the water and the bombers went after her."

Ray Richmond, after his escape from the *Oklahoma*, was able to get some clothing and then helped out at an antiaircraft gun. He fought alongside the gunners for two hours. "When it was all over I collapsed in pain," he said. "I didn't learn until later that my back was broken."

Jack Evans also didn't escape the attack unharmed. "I didn't realize some fragments from that first bomb on turret Number 2 had hit my legs until after the attack was over," he said. "One of my buddies said, 'Hey Jack, you're hit.' I looked down and saw four tracks

of dried blood running down both legs. I didn't want the Purple Heart, but I got it."

Stu Hedley went to the infirmary on Ford Island, and after being given clean clothes, began helping to care for wounded men.

By 9:45 it was all over. The attackers headed back to their carriers and returned to Japan. In their wake they left battleships on the bottom and heavily damaged along with several sunken and damaged cruisers, destroyers, and support ships. Army, Navy, and Marine aircraft were burning on the runways across Oahu. And 2,403 Americans were dead. Over the next several days, holes were cut into the hull of the capsized *Oklahoma* to free 32 trapped sailors. Of her crew of 1,398 officers and sailors, 429 died. The hospitals were choked with the wounded and dying.

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