

Two Hours That Changed History

The morning clouds had burned off over Pearl Harbor that Sunday fifteen years ago. Then the first bomb dropped from the first plane with the red-ball insignia on its wings.

By WALTER MILLIS

Fifteen years ago, the Japanese sprang their great surprise at Pearl Harbor, giving rise to a two-hour action which was to prove a major turning point of world history. On the great stage of global policy, Pearl Harbor was "decisive" beyond any battle of modern times. As a military operation, it has been aptly characterized by the British military historian, General J. F. C. Fuller: "On the one hand, it displayed a low cunning of incredible stupidity, and on the other hand a lack of imagination of unbelievable profundity." A brief answer to what actually happened on that day can be given only in an hour-by-hour account, unavoidably complicated by the fact that dates and hours in this affair of global compass differed around the world for events that were simultaneous.

Pearl Harbor, 4 P. M. Dec. 6
Washington, 9:30 P. M. Dec. 6
Tokyo, 11:30 A. M. Dec. 7

IT was about 9:30 on the evening of Saturday, Dec. 6, 1941, that a young White House naval aide carried into Franklin Roosevelt's study, where the President was sitting with Harry Hopkins, a locked pouch containing the latest intercepts of the Japanese diplomatic code messages. It was known that the Japanese were transmitting to their Washington embassy a final dispatch, probably ending the tortured negotiations of many months, and that it was being sent in fourteen parts. In the pouch were the first thirteen parts, as intercepted and translated by the American intelligence services; the last was still missing.

The President and Hopkins read the incomplete message. "This," said Roosevelt, "means war." Hopkins agreed. But there was nothing to indicate when the war might come, and there seemed nothing to be done about it at the moment.

We knew that evening that powerful Japanese forces were on the move southward, apparently headed for an attack upon the British in Malaya. Every American Pacific garrison, from the Philippines to the Canal Zone, had been fully alerted to the fact that war was imminent; and in all, precautions of one kind or another against sudden enemy action were being strictly enforced. On the Hawaiian airfields, for example, the planes were kept closely bunched as a protection against sabotage, while the Pacific Fleet never left Pearl Harbor without observing elaborate anti-submarine measures.

It is true that the fleet was in the base that Saturday afternoon for its usual week-end liberty; about one-third of its captains and perhaps half of its officer personnel were ashore, but one-third of its anti-aircraft batteries were fully manned and the rest

capable of being put promptly into action. The two aircraft carriers then based at Pearl Harbor were absent, delivering Marine fighter planes to reinforce the exposed outposts of Wake Island and Midway. In Manila, tension had been high for weeks; but the forces there had received only a part of the arms and air reinforcements which Washington was desperately trying to send and could do little more than wait. Only an hour or so after the quiet scene in the White House, a dozen more B-17 heavy bombers were leaving San Francisco for the Philippines, with Pearl Harbor their first stop.

Everybody knew that war in the Pacific was imminent. What nobody

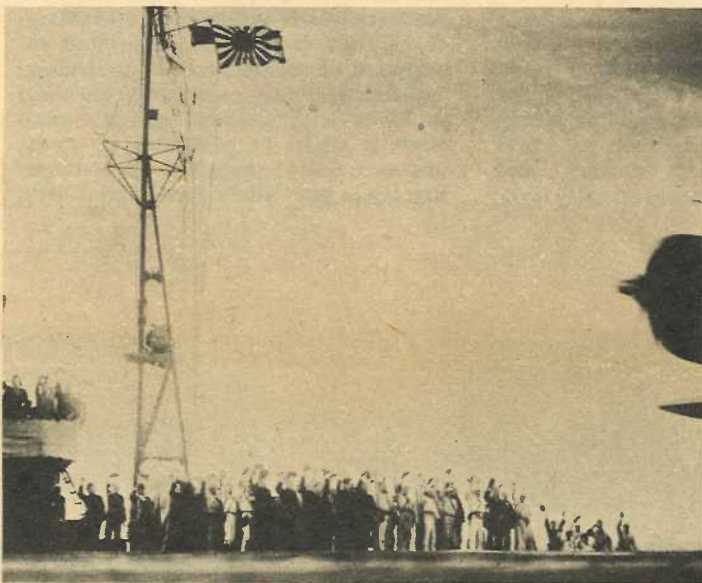
knew, or had even an inkling of, was the fact that at 9:30 Saturday evening, Washington time, a Japanese task force of six carriers and supporting craft, armed with some 360 combat airplanes, their pilots at the highest pitch of training and battle enthusiasm, was rapidly closing the island of Oahu from due north, an unguarded sector.

Pearl Harbor, 5 A. M. Dec. 7
Washington, 10:30 A. M. Dec. 7
Tokyo, 12:30 A. M. Dec. 8

EARLY on Sunday morning in Washington the fourteenth part of the Japanese message had been in-

tercepted and translated. Its tone was ultimative; and the intelligence officers hastened to get it to the President and other top officials, but it still carried no clue as to when Japan would act. It was not until about 10:30 on Sunday morning that Lieut. Comdr. Alwyn D. Kramer, in charge of the decoding operation, saw another intercept whose importance he at once recognized. "Will the Ambassador," it said, "please submit * * * our reply to the United States at 1 P. M. on the 7th, your time." The indicated moment was then two and a half hours away.

A quick calculation told Kramer that 1 P. M. in Washington would be after mid- (Continued on Page 150)



LAUNCHING—This Japanese picture shows crewmen of one of Nagumo's carriers cheering as planes take off to attack Pearl Harbor.



OVER TARGET—Here, as seen from a Japanese plane, bombs strike the battleships moored beside Ford Island in Pearl Harbor.



AFTERMATH—This U. S. Navy picture, taken after the initial destruction had been wrought, shows two of the American battleships, the West Virginia and the Tennessee, sinking at their moorings amid clouds of smoke, after being hit by torpedo and dive bombers.

WALTER MILLIS is a well-known writer on military affairs. Among his books are "This Is Pearl!" and "Arms and Men," just published.

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Two Hours That Changed History

(Continued from Page 15)

night in the Philippines and Malaya and shortly after sunrise—the most favorable time for air surprise—at Pearl Harbor. That something was going to happen somewhere in the Pacific within two and a half hours seemed highly probable, and Kramer set off at once to distribute the message.

It was then 5 o'clock on Sunday morning at Pearl Harbor. Seven of the eight battleships of the Pacific Fleet were moored two-by-two to the concrete bollards along the shore of Ford Island; the eighth was in drydock. Over eighty other combat ships and auxiliaries were at numerous docks and moorings. They were, as has been said, in a state of partial readiness.

THE Army and the shore-based naval air forces unfortunately were not. Most of the defensive aviation was parked wing-to-wing, many of the planes without gas or ammunition; the Army anti-aircraft batteries were not in position and their ammunition was in storage. To get either the guns or the fighter planes into effective action would be a matter of three or four hours.

The Army did have a single radar set in operation, high on the rugged north coast of Oahu, but it was on a purely training basis. It was operated only from 4 to 7 in the morning, while on this particular morning the control center, back at Fort Shafter, was in charge of a single Army Air Force lieutenant who had "very little conception" of what his duties were and supposed that he was there on "purely a practice run."

At this moment—5 A. M. at Pearl Harbor—the B-17's from San Francisco were approaching Oahu. Vice Admiral William F. Halsey, with the aircraft carrier Enterprise, was returning from his mission to Wake, preparing to fly off a combat air patrol at dawn with orders to precede the ships into Pearl Harbor and land at the Marine field at Ewa. The Lexington task force was still, happily, plowing through the darkness on its way to Midway.

Outside the Pearl Harbor entrance there were, as usual, a destroyer and two minesweepers on guard duty. An hour or so earlier one of the latter had thought that she had detected a submarine. But the supposed contact had been lost; and false submarine contacts were a dime a dozen at that time.

Pearl Harbor, 6 A. M. Dec. 7
Washington, 11:30 A. M. Dec. 7
Tokyo, 1:30 A. M. Dec. 8

IT was at 6 A. M. in the pre-dawn darkness of Sunday, Dec. 7, that Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, commanding the



WAR—Above, Japanese Ambassador Nomura, left, and special envoy Kurosu, as they left the State Department on Dec. 7, 1941, soon after the Pearl Harbor attack. Below, President Roosevelt, on Dec. 8, delivers his "date of infamy" address, asking Congress to declare war.



Pearl Harbor task force, swung his six carriers into the wind and launched his first wave of 183 planes—fifty-one dive bombers, forty torpedo bombers, forty-nine level bombers and a fighter escort of forty-three Zeros. The strike held southward, watching the sunrise come up through heavy cloud layers which, they feared, might obscure their targets.

IN Washington as the planes took the air, Admiral Harold E. Stark, the Chief of Naval Operations, was discussing the so-called "1 o'clock message" with his aides, but it did not occur to them that anything need be done about it. The Army had experienced difficulty in getting hold of its Chief of Staff, Gen. George C. Marshall, who had gone for a Sunday morning horseback ride. It was not until about 11:30 that the general reached his office and first saw the message; its possible importance was at once apparent to him, but time was lost in consultation with Stark.

It was nearly noon when Marshall drafted a warning dispatch for MacArthur at Manila and Lieut. Gen. Walter C. Short, commanding at Oahu: "Japanese are presenting at 1 P. M. Eastern standard time today what amounts to an ultimatum * * *. Just what significance the hour set

may have we do not know but be on alert accordingly." At Stark's request he added: "Inform naval authorities." The dispatch went down the hall to the Army message center, which reported that it would be delivered at Manila and Pearl Harbor within half an hour. But it ran into transmission difficulties; Short was not to receive it until some eight hours later.

As General Marshall was scribbling his warning, U. S. S. Ward, the destroyer on guard off the Pearl Harbor entrance, positively identified the conning tower of a midget submarine in the growing dawn. The Ward went to general quarters and charged down; at 6:45 she fired a salvo from her 4-inch guns (the first shots of the Pacific war) and the conning tower disappeared.

To make sure there would be no mistake about the reality of this contact, she reported: "We have attacked, fired upon and dropped depth charges upon submarine operating in defensive sea area." This was logged at 6:53, but the precious remaining hour proved insufficient to energize the Pearl Harbor commands into a realization of its significance.

In Tokyo they were in the small hours of Monday morning. At 12:30 A. M. the American Ambassador had secured

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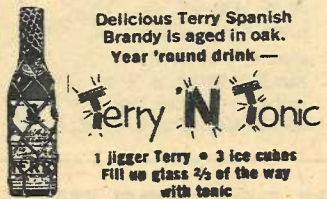


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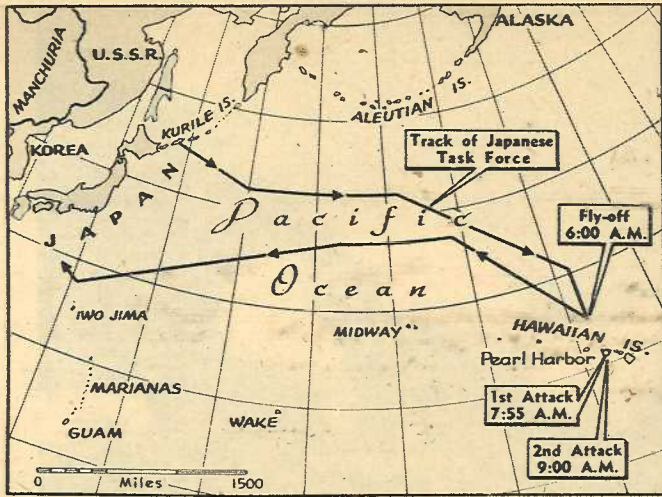
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ATTACK TRACK—This map shows the route of the Japanese task force from its sailing on Nov. 26, from the Kuriles, through the launching of its bombers against Pearl Harbor, to its return to home waters.

(Continued from Preceding Page)

an urgent interview with the Foreign Minister, Shigenori Togo, to present an appeal for peace from the President of the United States direct to the Emperor of Japan. The Foreign Minister took it along to the Prime Minister, Hideki Tojo; neither man saw anything new in it, but they agreed that they had better let the Emperor see it.

About 1:30 the Foreign Minister set off for the Imperial Palace. "It's a pity," he remarked "jocularly," as he left, "to run around disturbing people in the middle of the night." He knew that within an hour or so Nagumo's bombs and torpedoes would be thundering into the Pacific Fleet.

Pearl Harbor, 7:30 A. M., Dec. 7
Washington, 1 P. M., Dec. 7
Tokyo, 3 A. M., Dec. 8

IN Tokyo by 3 o'clock Monday morning the Foreign Minister had submitted the President's message, had received the Emperor's assent to the reply which Tojo and Togo had drafted, and was on his way home. In Washington at the same time, a Sunday morning conference of the Secretaries of State, War and Navy was breaking up for lunch. The "1 o'clock message" had been handed in to them, but they had been discussing the broader political implications of the situation rather than its immediate military possibilities. Just as they were parting, the Japanese Embassy rang up to request an interview with the Secretary of State for 1 P. M. Secretary Hull, knowing what they would bring, set his lips in a firmer line.

On Oahu, the Army radar training operation had been directed to secure at 7 A. M. The control center had shut down at that time, and its crew had departed; but the two privates manning the set on the north shoulder of Oahu thought they might as well keep it going as an exercise, since their relief was not yet due.

They had barely returned to the scope when they saw a tremendous "blip" shimmering before them. They thought

something might be wrong with the set, but a quick check indicated that everything was in order. The machine was telling them that a large number of airplanes, bearing almost due north and 137 miles out when first sighted, was rapidly closing the island. They called the control center, but the crew had gone, and when they finally raised the air lieutenant in command—who was as ignorant of the device as they were—he told them to forget about it. It might be anything, perhaps the B-17's coming in from the mainland.

They plotted the advancing formation until, about twenty miles out, it was lost among the echoes from the sea and surrounding hills. Then they secured the station. It was about 7:30.

Pearl Harbor, 8 A. M., Dec. 7
Washington, 1:30 P. M., Dec. 7
Tokyo, 3:30 A. M., Dec. 8

OVER Oahu the morning clouds had burned off, promising a fine day. In the ninety-four naval vessels present in Pearl Harbor the off watches had been sent to breakfast. Morning colors, according to immemorial naval custom, were at 8; and the ships were on the point of piping the preparatory signal at 7:55, when a single plane streaked low across Ford Island and dropped a bomb.

A somewhat junior rear admiral, W. R. Furlong, who happened to be senior officer afloat, was taking the air on the quarter deck of his antique flagship, the mine-layer Oglala. He saw the bomb drop, thought it an accident, and then as the plane swept past him recognized the red ball insignia on its wings. Admiral Furlong barely had time to call for general quarters and order the fleet to sortie before Pearl Harbor was overwhelmed.

Within the first two or three minutes both the fleet and every military air installation on the island (except one Army airstrip of which the Japanese were ignorant) had been jumped by the 183 aircraft of Nagumo's first

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 wave. As the Japanese reached the island and saw that the skies were clear of either cloud or defensive aviation, the attack order was given and the strike split up according to a carefully rehearsed plan, to hit the various targets almost simultaneously and from numerous directions.

SOME of the dive bombers had gone in upon Wheeler Field, in the center of the island, where most of the American fighter planes were parked wing-to-wing and helpless. Wheeler was already a blaze of destruction when the Japanese fighters followed with their machine guns spitting. The Navy seaplane base at Kaneohe on the east coast, the air base at Ford Island, the Marine airfield at Ewa and the Army's big Hickam Field (fortunately containing few usable aircraft) were all a shambles before 8 A. M.

To take out the air defense in the first moments accorded with accepted doctrine, but the real targets were the ships. The Japanese knew that the big prize—the aircraft carriers—had probably eluded them, but they saw that all eight battleships were there.

The torpedo bombers came in low, attacking the ships on both sides of Ford Island from different directions; even the ready anti-aircraft batteries were barely getting into action as they dropped their "fish" and, looking back, saw the great geysers leap into the air against the sides of the moored battleships. The dive bombers were on their heels, carrying conventional 500-pound bombs; then came the level bombers dropping converted 16-inch naval armor-piercing shells.

The battleship Oklahoma was one of the outer vessels in the paired line along Ford Island. In the very first moments—she was still sounding general quarters—she was hit by three torpedoes and began slowly to capsize. The West Virginia, just astern, took a torpedo before 7:56 and was hit repeatedly thereafter; however, owing to the exertions of her crew, she sank on an even keel, and so could ultimately be salvaged.

THE Arizona, next astern, was in an inboard berth but protected only by the much smaller repair ship, Vestal. In the first minute or two a torpedo streaked past Vestal's bow to explode in the battleship; a little later an armor-piercing bomb reached her forward magazine and the Arizona blew up with a frightful detonation, the flames leaping hundreds of feet in the air and vast billows of smoke pouring up from the oil fires. She was hit several times again, one bomb going down her stack; eleven hundred officers and men died in her, while the oil fires imperiled every ship around.

By 8 o'clock the ships were



HOLOCAUST—The Japanese struck hard at airfields, though ships were the real targets. This is Pearl Harbor Naval Air Base after the attack.

firing every anti-aircraft weapon they could bring to bear; on the airfields men were wrenching machine guns from the wrecked planes and putting them into action; some were even uselessly firing with rifles and pistols. Officers and men ashore were snatching every means they could think of to get back to their ships—not a few swam for it. A sleepy civilian population was shaking itself awake, while a Western Union messenger, bicycling toward Pearl Harbor with General Marshall's last-minute warning for Short, took sudden refuge in a ditch. It was just before 8 that Ford Island broadcast the dispatch which shook the world: "AIR RAID, PEARL HARBOR—THIS IS NOT DRILL."

Pearl Harbor, 8:30 A. M., Dec. 7
 Washington, 2 P. M., Dec. 7
 Tokyo, 4 A. M., Dec. 7

MOST of the damage had been done in the first fifteen or twenty minutes, and by 8:30 the Japanese planes of the first wave were fading back into the skies. They had met almost no air opposition. The combat air patrol from the Enterprise had flown, unwittingly into the midst of the battle, but could do little; so had the B-17's from San Francisco, but they were without their armament. (Fortunately, all but one managed to get down more or less intact.) The Army put up a couple of fighters from the overlooked airstrip at 8:15, and more later in the morning, but the air defense of the great base had been effectively paralyzed in the first minutes.

At 8:32 the listing Oklahoma rolled bottom up, her crew running over the turning bottom plates under Japanese strafing fire, her masts crum-

pling in the Pearl Harbor mud. Except for the Pennsylvania, in drydock across the harbor, every battleship had by that time been badly hit. The Nevada alone had been able to get under way, under the command of a reserve lieutenant commander, her senior officers all being ashore. He handled her "superbly." All the rest had been destroyed or disabled, and the Nevada was not to stay afloat for long.

THE great, greasy billows of smoke from the oil fires were still pouring skyward; the cruisers Raleigh and Helena had taken heavy damage. Admiral Furlong's Oglala had her bottom blown out and had capsized; the old battleship Utah, used only as a target vessel but berthed where the carriers usually lay, had turned turtle.

In Washington, Secretary Hull was still waiting in the State Department for the Japanese (who telephoned to say that they had been delayed) to deliver the note which the Secretary had already read. Secretary Knox had finished his lunch in the Navy Department and was talking with Stark and his Chief of War Plans, when, about 1:50, the dispatch was handed in: "Air raid on Pearl Harbor." In Tokyo, Foreign Minister Togo was returning through the darkness to his residence, bearing the Emperor's approval of the draft reply to the President. As he reached home, the Navy Ministry was calling to report the successful attack.

At Pearl about 9 o'clock Nagumo's second wave of 170 planes began to arrive. Theirs was essentially a mopping-up mission—there were no torpedo planes in the second

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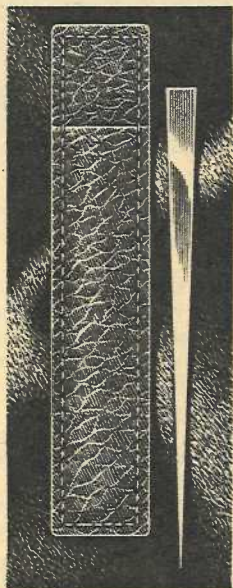
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(Continued from Preceding Page) wave and it carried only conventional 500-pound bombs—but there was little mopping-up left to be done. Also, there was now some defensive aviation in the air and the anti-aircraft was more effective. The second wave caught the Nevada standing bravely down channel and helped drive her ashore.

They landed a direct hit on the one undamaged battleship, Pennsylvania, but the damage was not great and since the ship was already in drydock it was easily repairable. But they also landed a hit between two destroyers in the same dock, knocking them off their blocks and starting dangerous fires. Both were badly wrecked. Another destroyer, the Shaw, was in a near-by floating dock. A direct hit exploded her forward magazine; her whole bow was blown off and the dock sank beneath her. (Both ship and dock were later raised, repaired and returned to service.)

THE second wave worked over the airfields again and shot down one or two fighters trying to get into the air; they put a bomb into the cruiser Honolulu. But the primary job had been done. A more alert and flexible command might have switched the second wave to the many fat targets which had not been touched—the totally exposed oil tank farms, which held the life blood of any American Pacific naval operation, the submarine flotillas, the dockyards out of which the Pacific Fleet was again to arise. But these were not on the elaborately pre-planned schedule.

By 9:30 it was virtually all over, as the second wave fol-

lowed the first back to the carriers, leaving the base shattered.

Pearl Harbor, 9:30 A. M., Dec. 7
Washington, 3 P. M., Dec. 7
Tokyo, 5 A. M., Dec. 8

AT Pearl Harbor the rest of the day was to go to frantic searches, sorties, ineffective efforts to find the enemy who had launched this crushing blow. In Nagumo's plotting room, as the planes returned, there was an argument for continuing on south around the islands in the hope of gathering in the American aircraft carriers. It was vetoed by logistics and the fuel supply. With the loss of only twenty-nine planes and fifty-five men, they had knocked out all eight battleships of the Pacific Fleet; it was inadvisable to take further risks. About 1 P. M., with all surviving planes recovered, Nagumo reversed course and retired more or less as he had come, undetected from beginning to end.

Nagumo's second wave had just been arriving over Pearl Harbor when, at 2:20 P. M. in Washington, the two Japanese Ambassadors were finally ushered into Secretary Hull's office. The Secretary pretended to read through the pages of their message and then "put my eye" on the senior Ambassador, Kichisaburo Nomura. "In all my fifty years of public service," he said, "I have never seen a document that was more crowded with infamous falsehoods and distortions * * * I never imagined until this day that any government on this planet was capable of uttering them." Mr. Hull knew of the attack. He could then have had no idea of its appalling success.

Neither could the Philippine
(Continued on Following Page)

FROM POLAND TO PEARL HARBOR

1939

- Sept. 1—Germany sets off World War II by invading Poland.
- Sept. 3—Britain and France declare war on Germany.
- Sept. 28—Germany and Russia divide Poland between them.

1940

- May 10—Germany invades Low Countries, beginning the drive on France.
- May 26-June 3—Evacuation of Dunkirk.
- June 10—Italy declares war on Allies.
- June 22—Defeated France signs armistice with Germany.
- July 29—Germans begin mass air attacks on Britain.
- Sept. 22—France's Vichy Government grants bases in Indochina to Japan.
- Sept. 27—Germany, Italy and Japan sign Berlin Pact of alliance.

1941

- March 11—American Lend-Lease aid to Allies becomes law.
- April 6—Germans invade Yugoslavia and Greece.
- May 18—Italians surrender in Ethiopia.
- June 22—Germans launch vast attack on Russia.
- July 23—Vichy Government accepts Japanese occupation of Indochina.
- Aug. 14—Churchill and Roosevelt issue statement of peace aims after secret Atlantic meeting.
- Oct. 2—Germans, having overrun much of the Ukraine, launch all-out attack on Moscow.
- Oct. 18—U. S. relations with Japan take turn for worse as pro-Axis Hideki Tojo becomes Japanese Premier.
- Nov. 5—Japanese special envoy Saburo Kurusu leaves for United States with Japan's "last proposals."
- Nov. 26—Japanese fleet sails secretly to attack Pearl Harbor.

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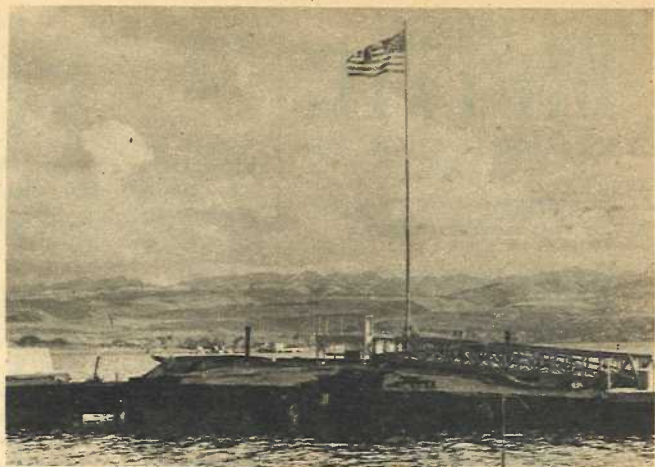
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TODAY—Fifteen years after the battleship Arizona blew up and sank at Pearl Harbor with a loss of 1,100 men, it remains a memorial to its crew. The flag still flies over its unsubmerged superstructure.

(Continued from Preceding Page)

command nor the British in Singapore; but they were in no doubt as to what it signified for them. The famous dispatch, "Air raid on Pearl Harbor," was heard in Admiral T. C. Hart's headquarters in Manila. In the darkness between 4 and 5 that Monday morning telephones were ringing in the higher headquarters; sleepy generals were picking up the receivers, and all were instantly realizing what it meant. Maj. Gen. Jonathan M. Wainwright, the ground commander in the Philippines, jiggled the telephone to get his aide: "Johnny," he said, "the cat has jumped." By dawn the Philippines were fully alert.

It was not, as it turned out, to save them from disaster when the first attack came, some nine hours after the Pearl Harbor dispatch. Nor was the alarm to save the British battleships from Singapore, caught in their sortie two or three days later.

But it is impossible to enter here into the events in the Far East; unless to note that Ambassador Grew in Tokyo was given no inkling of what had happened until he was summoned to a conference with the Foreign Minister at 7:30 A. M. Even then he was not told; and only later, when he heard the extras being called in the street outside the Embassy, did he learn that the United States and Japan were at war. By that time Nagumo's planes had long since disappeared, and even the oil fires were beginning to die away.

PEARL HARBOR produced innumerable tales of heroism and anguish, first entries in the bitter and glorious record to be amassed over the next four years. Tales of men who met the appalling tide of savagery with any weapon they could snatch up and by any means ingenuity could suggest. Of men who struggled desperately to get themselves back on board ships already blazing and sinking. Of junior and reserve officers who fought their ships with skill and coolness in the absence of their seniors or after the latter had been killed; or who on their own initiative did

what they realized had to be done in counterflooding and damage control. (The West Virginia was saved from total destruction largely by the efforts of her junior officers after the captain had been eviscerated by a bomb hit on the ship alongside.)

It produced tales of the men shot down as they tried to get their fighter planes in the air. Of the men who still served the Arizona's batteries when their comrades had been incinerated below, when power for the ammunition hoists had failed and the flames were sweeping their gun positions. Of men who climbed from one sinking ship to the next to help carry on with the anti-aircraft and the fire-fighting. Of the men who bravely faced an inevitable but agonizingly lingering death, trapped in the bottom compartments of the overturned Oklahoma, in total darkness and unable, through the many days they lived, to signal their presence to rescuers. Of countless men, struck suddenly by terror and surprise, some of whom doubtless failed but most of whom did not.

FROM both services, 2,335 in all lost their lives, nearly half from the complement of the doomed Arizona. The total casualties (including sixty-eight civilian dead and thirty-five civilian wounded) were 3,581.

Such was the price of what Fuller calls "a lack of imagination of unbelievable profundity." The Japanese lost fifty-five men in destroying or disabling the entire American battleship strength in the Pacific. They thereby brought a divided United States unanimously and wholeheartedly into war against them.

While they had perhaps gained a few months' freedom for their advance into Southeast Asia (even this is questionable, as the real utility of the battleships in preventing the advance is uncertain) they had inflicted no serious damage upon the American military-industrial potential; and they had ensured that it would be mobilized in its maximum of power for their own destruction.

This was the price of what Fuller also calls "a low cunning of incredible stupidity."

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