

I Remember Pearl Harbor

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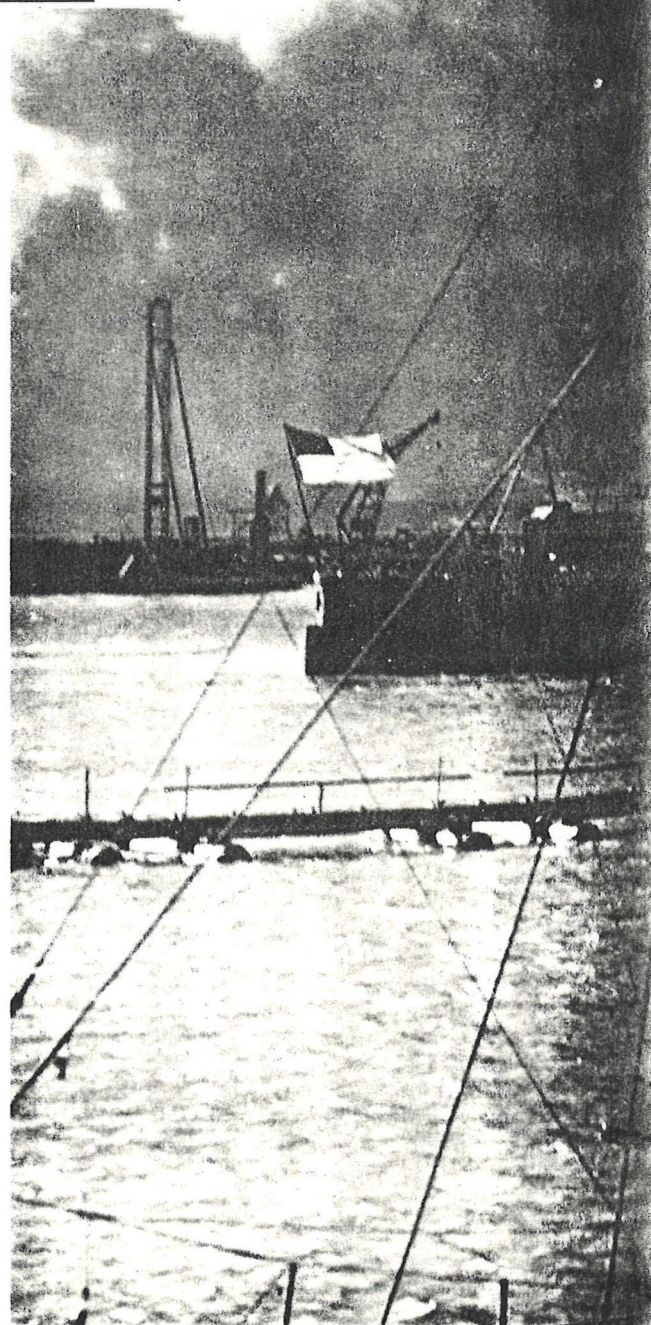
REVISIONIST - But not
1972 conspiracy
See PA Symposium
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On the morning of 7 December 1941, I was awakened by the Assistant Quartermaster of the Watch of the USS *Nevada* (BB-36).

"Mr. Taussig, it's 0700. You have the forenoon watch, Sir."

Promptly at 15 minutes to eight, I reported on the quarterdeck to relieve the Officer of the Deck who had stood the morning watch. I am not really sure of the exact details of the next ten to 12 minutes. I do know that the relieved Officer of the Deck was still on the quarterdeck at about five minutes to eight; possibly he was completing his Log. There was a liberty party of about a dozen men waiting for the 0800 motor launch. In my 21-year-old mind was the gnawing question of whether the correct-sized national ensign had been ordered for the raising of colors at 0800 on this Sunday Morning. I remember sending a messenger forward to call from our bow to the stern of the *Arizona* (BB-39) moored only 20 or 30 feet ahead of the *Nevada*, and I was watching the sailor pass up the port side of the *Nevada* when I caught a glimpse of a torpedo

Six months out of the Naval Academy, Ensign Taussig—the son and grandson of distinguished naval officers—lay grievously wounded but mentally alert, in the Sky Control station of the USS Nevada as the burning battleship moved slowly away from the other battered ships at Pearl Harbor.



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plane flying from the east and very low over the water.

The bomb-bay doors were open, and out dropped a "fish." My reaction was merely to think of the welcome break in the Sunday morning tedium that we would have watching the salvage operation of digging the torpedo out of the mud under 40 feet of water, the controlling depth of Pearl Harbor. Absently, I tabbed the aircraft as a Douglas "TBD" type.

Moments later, a plume of water spouted from the side of a ship ahead of the *Nevada* in Battleship Row. The noise of the explosion as the torpedo hit and the incredible realization that the TBD was a Japanese plane, the Rising Suns on its wings plainly visible, galvanized me into action.

Immediately, I left the quarterdeck and climbed the six ladders to my battle station in the starboard anti-aircraft director.

Personal involvement in historical happenings creates vivid, life-long memories for the participant, but rare is the man who, at the moment, can visualize the entire forest being destroyed—he is far too busy ducking the trees that are falling all around him. As an individual, then, my view was restricted to what was going on in my immediate vicinity. I was conscious of the fact, that, before I reached my battle station, the starboard anti-aircraft battery was firing and that someone had pulled the safety firing cut-outs which normally restricted the firing elevations of the guns to 65 degrees. As I climbed through the door of the director, I was conscious that the cross hairs on my check sight were on an airplane, and I saw that it was hit almost immediately and went down trailing smoke.

The director was slewing around for another target when I was hit by a missile which passed completely through my thigh and through the case of the ballistic computer of the director which was directly in front of me. There was no pain, and because I was clutching the sides of the hatch as the director slewed around, I did not fall down. My left foot was grotesquely under my left armpit, but in the detachment of shock, I was not aware that this was particularly bad.

They carried me into the Sky Control structure between the two AA directors, and laid me out on the deck. Eventually a hospital corpsman arrived with a basket stretcher, administered a shot of morphine, and got me into the stretcher. The rest of the morning was spent "observing" the battle of Pearl Harbor through the eyes of the enlisted personnel who remained with me.

Today, with almost the same detachment that I studied the Battle of Jutland when at the Naval War College, I try to follow the unending Battle of the

Bookcases as the new "historians" ally themselves—or clash—with the old in refighting Pearl Harbor. Yet, I do not consider myself a Pearl Harbor buff, for I have never made a formal study of the causes and effects of that battle.

Even when I returned to Pearl Harbor in 1949 as Administrative Aide to the Commander, Naval Base, Pearl Harbor, I experienced the same sense of personal detachment insofar as the strategic and policy reasons for the debacle were concerned.

During my tour as the Secretary-Treasurer of the Naval Institute, I was constantly reminded of my very real ignorance of the battle. I was neither a revisionist, an apologist, or anything else, I told myself. What had happened had happened, insofar as politico-strategic aspects were concerned. Neither as ensign nor as commander were there very many contributions I could make to the guesswork behind the scenes leading to the defeat of our Fleet. Yet, I was not without my opinions.

Personally, I felt, and still do, that Admiral Kimmel and General Short were treated in a totally unfair and unethical manner. Even today, I can clearly visualize Admiral Kimmel running out to his lanai when the noise of battle alerted him to what was going on. What should he have done? Dashed to his den and picked up a pistol or a shot gun? Run out to his car and raced to his headquarters? And when he got there, what was he to do? Call Washington?

If, as may be inferred, he and General Short failed to display sufficient foresight, their inquisitors, in uniform and out, later made up for it by their dazzling exhibitions of hindsight. But, of course, someone had to shoulder the blame for a catastrophic tactical situation—which, in the opinion of many, was merely the inevitable result of the actions of the strategic and political planners in Washington.

To be more specific: in my opinion, the only possible result of any "prior alert" in which the Fleet might have had an opportunity to sortie would have exacted a far greater death toll—though probably fewer wounded, since we would have drowned—than actually occurred.*

I do think it odd, too, that the pre-dawn warnings were ignored insofar as the destroyer-submarine action was concerned. I do not, however, think it strange that the so-called "radar warning" was ignored, for, as Sir Winston might have put it, it had much to be ignored about. On 7 December 1941, this experimental equipment was extremely unreliable, mostly because it was, so to speak, "false-return-prone." A flight of gulls, for

* See C. W. Nimitz, "Pearl Harbor Postscript," U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings, December 1966, p. 126.

example, could snafu the entire system, and anyone purporting to see a "flight of bombers" on an "A-scope," circa December 1941, was indeed a seer of great perception. One aircraft made the same mess on the scope as a hundred—and any number of boats, ships, and sea gulls could do the same thing.

The *Nevada* was as typical a battleship as one might find. Some of the battleships had more anti-aircraft protection than the *Nevada*, some had less. One or two cruisers had far better anti-aircraft protection than any battleship—although this was not generally known, and certainly not generally appreciated in retrospect. Even then, what was "better" than the *Nevada* was better only in degree.

In sum and substance, the Fleet actually lacked an anti-aircraft protection worthy of the name. It is, in fact, remarkable, that *any* Japanese aircraft were actually shot down by these batteries!

My director was designated a Ford Mark 19. It was considered to be among the very best AA directors in the Navy. It served seven 5-inch, 25-caliber anti-aircraft guns on the Starboard Battery.

Let us look at these guns and how they were served. The pointer elevated the gun either by matching the signals sent from the director, or by eye. The trainer trained the gun in azimuth in the same method. The fuze setter set a timing mechanism on his "fuze pots," in accordance to the director order, or the order of the gun captain or battery officer if the guns were being fired by local control.

The ammunition was "semi-fixed," the projectile being lodged in a brass casing which held the primer and powder, and which was ejected from the gun after firing.

This ammunition was either in cans, stowed in "ready boxes" or arrived at the lip of the ammunition hoists from below decks magazines. A third loader would strip the protecting wires from the rim of the can; tilt the can so the ammunition could be handled by a second loader. This man then placed the ammunition nose-down in one of the three fuze pots, which set the mechanical/powder fuze. The first loader would reach over, pick up a shell from the fuze pot, and place it on a tray under the chamber of the gun. The gun captain would shove a lever, and the shell would be rammed home by compressed air. Automatically the breach would close, and if the firing circuits were also closed, the gun would fire, recoil, and eject the empty cartridge. The first loader would start the action all over again by placing another shell on the tray.

This was an amazingly fast and efficient method. We could often load and fire 20 or more shells a minute over a sustained period. The enlisted men were drilled

for interminable hours into teams of near-inhuman perfection. Fortunately, too, we had drilled almost every sailorman in the ship.

The fire control crews were equally expert. We often spent as many as ten hours a day manning the directors. The range finder operators were superior. The director pointers and trainers, in conjunction with the director officers were expert in obtaining the "set-up."

This amounted to "solving" the course, speed, and altitude of the target; compensating for the drift caused by the winds aloft; calculating the lead angles to properly lead the target during the flight of the projectile; and determining the length of time to set on the fuze to cause the projectile to explode at the pre-determined point where it met the aircraft. These signals were sent to the gun crews.

This was an electro-mechanical marvel, to be sure—but it was not "electronic."

It was certainly better than anything else, but even so, the best was not good enough.

In the first place, despite all our "training," the constraints placed upon us by a combination of the safety regulations and the requirements of Fleet "competitions" had restricted our actual firing practices to artificial bounds which were tactically unacceptable. We had never fired the guns at an aircraft towing a sleeve more than 110 knots (in fact, my director was being modified to allow us to track a plane making 180 knots as opposed to its then-capacity of 150 knots). We had never fired at a sleeve target (much less a drone) that was not in level flight, at a height greater than 9,000 feet, or approaching more than 45 degrees forward or abaft the beam.

Sometimes, even within these constraints, we were able to put a few holes in a sleeve. Many times, we couldn't even get close. This was not the fault of the crews. They were drilled incessantly, and performed perfectly. It was purely a matter of equipment.

In essence, the equipment could not possibly perform to meet an actual tactical situation. Once my director was rendered inoperable, all fire was conducted by "local control" which was literally "seaman's eye." Further, by the perversities of design by the Bureau of Ships and the Bureau of Ordnance, the air compressors serving the guns were far below decks, and once the air lines were damaged, the guns had to be rammed by hand. (I was particularly bitter about this, for as a midshipman I had written the Bureau of Ordnance suggesting that they could alleviate the recoil problem as well as the remote air compressor problem if they placed a piston on the barrel of each gun and a cylinder on the slide. Thus, the recoil would jam the piston into the cylinder, compressing the air and taking up some of the recoil. This suggestion was met by a snide

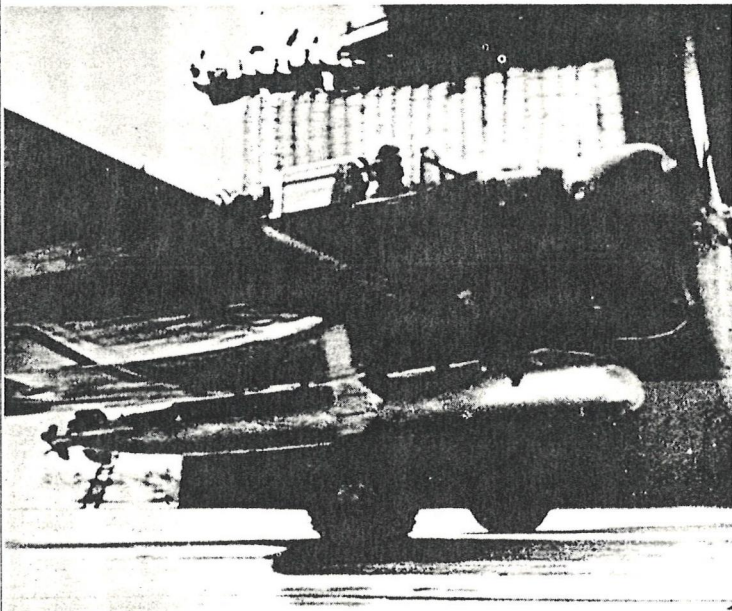
letter from BuOrd reminding me that I was unsatisfactory in Spanish and on the borderline in Math, and perhaps I should spend more time pounding the books than pounding their ears.)

The "Secondary AA Battery" on the *Nevada* was pathetic. Eight old .50-caliber machine guns, on the top of the masts in what we called the "Bird Baths," were our total battery. Other ships had locally controlled 3-inch/50s; while a couple of cruisers had 1.1-inch secondary AA batteries.

Six months later, at the Battle of Midway, the ships sprouted all manner of automatic smaller caliber guns, and *these* held off the devastating effects of torpedoes which played such havoc with the ships at Pearl Harbor. The 1.1-inchers, the 20-mm. and the 40-mm. guns spelled the difference for the remainder of World War II. The United States did not lose a single battleship once these guns were installed.

But, at Pearl Harbor, there was the *Nevada*. We had been outfitted with gun tubs during an overhaul in late 1940, into which the 1.1-inch guns would be installed. But these tubs were still empty in late 1941.

As stated earlier, had the Fleet "been alert and at



The success of torpedo-armed aircraft, such as this "Kate," was so impressive at Pearl Harbor, that, had a second attack taken place, torpedo planes probably would have replaced all of the high-level bombers, and nearly all of the dive bombers.

sea," as it should have been according to many critics, many of those who survived Pearl Harbor would have been consigned to watery graves simply because the weaponry intended to defend against air attack was incapable of meeting the threat posed by the Japanese.

The only hope, had we been to sea, was that the Japanese might not have found us. As for myself, given a second turn, I would choose to be in a vessel that was tied up alongside the quays, exactly as we were. Permit me to reiterate my point: *The defeat at Pearl Harbor was basically attributable to the lack of effective anti-aircraft guns.*

Let us now cross over into the enemy camp for a moment.

During my stewardship of the U. S. Naval Institute, I was "on the bridge" when Captain Mitsuo Fuchida of the Japanese Navy wrote his article "I Led the Air Attack on Pearl Harbor," which was published in the September 1952 issue of the *Proceedings*.

Captain Fuchida gave the lie to the canard that the "Fleet was asleep," by stating unequivocally that he was amazed, as he flew in from the west in the high altitude bombers, that so much anti-aircraft fire was already in the air. Indeed, my experience was exactly the same. Assuming that we should not have been manning the guns 24 hours a day, the reaction time to the threat was amazing. I ran up six ladders and along a few feet of deck—and the guns were not only manned and ready, but had been on the "kill."

Here, even previous warning would not have helped much, in my opinion. The real *material* damage at Pearl Harbor was done by the torpedo planes. They caused the *Oklahoma* to roll over; the shock of explosion rolled over the *Ogalala* next to the *Helena*. Torpedoes caused the *California* to settle. Torpedoes undoubtedly broke the back of the *Arizona*, probably allowing a bomb to penetrate the top of Number Two Turret or possibly pass close by the barrette and explode the main battery ammunition. I only wish that bomb had "gone down the stack" as is popularly believed. Hundreds of men would be alive today had this Hollywood scenario been followed, since the stack of the *Arizona* was shaped like an inverted "Y," with the uptakes angled radically from the top of the stack to the boiler rooms. A bomb dropping down the stack would have exploded in the "uptakes" and in the spaces below. Even a boiler explosion (and the *Arizona* probably had but one boiler in operation) would not have caused the horrible explosion that did occur in that ship.

Bomb damage to ships was substantial only where the destroyers were struck in the drydocks. These relatively fragile ships were penetrated to their magazines, and exploded.

But, on the battleships, which were the main Japa-

nese target, the bombs damaged only the superstructure areas. To be sure, they killed a lot of people, started a lot of fires, and broke up a lot of gear. But, structurally, they did no damage of consequence to the battleships, save for the bomb which caused the explosion of the *Arizona*—if indeed it was a bomb.

Still, of all the battleships, only the *Arizona* and the *Oklahoma* did not live to fight another day. Later, the *Oklahoma* was raised, and possibly could have been refitted, but by that time, our war economy was turning out ships newer than the *Oklahoma*, which had been built prior to World War I.

The torpedo lesson was not lost on the Japanese. Had a second Pearl Harbor attack been made under the same circumstances, I am sure that their mix of aircraft would have been entirely different. There probably would have been no high-level bombers at all. Instead, their places would have been taken by torpedo planes. The number of dive bombers would also have been smaller; again, their places would have been taken by torpedo planes.

How effective were the torpedoes? About 350 pounds of high explosives underwater created a gaping hole in the *Nevada's* bow almost 20 by 40 feet, whereas a 500-pound bomb (or thereabouts) made a small hole in the boat deck and the gun deck below, and exploded in a compartment without even damaging the bulkheads. The *Nevada* sustained about 14 bomb hits and near-misses. But one torpedo really hurt us badly.

Having often second-guessed the Japanese "mix" of aircraft (I guess I *am* a bit of a Pearl Harbor buff, at that) there were several other questions I had concerning their tactics during the battle.

It was not until 1969, for example, that my curiosity finally impelled me to ascertain why the Japanese had failed to do certain obvious things, and even now, I am only able to guess why I think they failed.

Their strategy, insofar as the local attack was concerned, was to destroy and paralyze the Fleet, particularly the battleships and the carriers, and, since the carriers were at sea, the targets were then the battleships. But, in addition, their targets should have included the fuel and ammunition supplies. There, in plain view of every aviator, was the Tank Farm at the Naval Supply Depot, less than a half a mile from Battleship Row. Yet, not one Japanese aviator took the trouble to drop a bomb on this tempting target. One lucky hit would have sorely curtailed the fuel supplies in the Pacific, and created a logistics nightmare, since there were only three tankers in the entire Navy's West Coast inventory on 7 December 1941. This Japanese error or omission freed the Navy of the replenishment effort for their forward base, and allowed them that

much more time to put in the effort to win the Battle of Midway in June 1942. Why was it not bombed?

I asked the question point-blank of the senior surviving Japanese admiral, and he replied ingenuously that nobody had thought of this target. I do not doubt him. Yet, while the Eskimo may start out his hunt thinking of nothing but succulent seal, he will very quickly start thinking polar bear if one rears up in front of him as vividly as the tank farm must have appeared to some of the Japanese pilots. Perhaps the real answer is that the young Japanese pilots suffered the "medal fever" common to all young people. They got medals for sinking battleships, not for blowing up fuel farms.

Why, also, had not the Japanese dropped a bomb in the Ammunition Depot at West Loch? Here was a truly tasty target: thousands of 14-inch and 16-inch shells, each with two powder bags of between 75 pounds and 90 pounds each of smokeless powder were out there in plain sight. The *Nevada*, alone, had 1,440 14-inch shells at West Loch (we were being furnished new caliber shells); and 2,880 70-pound bags of smokeless powder. The explosion would have rattled the windows in Topeka, Kansas, but, more importantly for the Japanese, it would have been the kind of solar plexus punch that would have guaranteed that the stunned U. S. Navy would not quickly be back on its feet. Almost unbelievably, the Japanese did not know of the ammunition facility at West Loch—a lack of military intelligence which is astounding. It was no secret in the Fleet—in fact, family picnics were often held there.

Finally, I have always been at a loss to understand why the Japanese did not know accurately what ships were in the harbor, and their exact placement. They had sent a small submarine around the harbor early in the morning of 7 December and her cramped crew did a truly miserable job of identification.

But why this ploy was necessary in the first place is difficult to understand. All the girls in Pearl Harbor knew. And the Japanese spies at Pearl could have found out the same way the ladies did. I must digress in order to explain.

We ensigns—and even some of the older officers—were forbidden to tell our lady friends when we would be in the harbor and when we would be at sea. Thus, like the traditional shipboard announcement, "There will be liberty—but no boats!" a young lady could always get a date, but her male partner might not always be able to keep it.

This infuriating policy had produced the most expert group of ship recognition experts ever trained. The girls would anxiously drive up the public highways to Aiea, slow their cars down, and identify the various ships in the Harbor. "The *Allwyn* is out," one girl might

say, "I hope that cute Ensign from the *Rowan* calls me tonight; it's in."

No matter how hard the U. S. Navy tried to keep secret which ships were in and where, every young lady worth her salt in the Hawaiian area could tell you exactly what ships were in or out, and where the in-port ships were berthed. (This was important intelligence because of the necessity to catch the motor boats to those ships not berthed alongside the docks.)

What, then, have we added to the body of literature concerning Pearl Harbor? Perhaps a little. My purpose has been twofold. First, I hope that the historians, neo- and otherwise, will ponder the tactical/strategic implications of the facts as set forth. They need to weigh as many as possible of the "words of tongue and pen" if they are to play the age-old game of "It might have been . . ."

Secondly, I hope I have spoken to the subject of preparedness. The Navy and the nation cannot hope today to have the remarkably fortuitous mix of enlisted personnel exemplified by our truly professional rated men who were products of a bygone age. Many of these men spent years upon years in the same ship; others were the younger Depression-motivated sailormen who furnished us such a fine nucleus of young officers once they were commissioned. The quality of the enlisted personnel, vis-à-vis their ships was so superior as to make one groan in anguish today when comparing the turnover that is now considered normal among the men who, in the last analysis, must fight the ship.

Moreover, in material readiness, we are at least as deficient as in personnel. Unlike the bluejacket's standard lament, "The chow is lousy, and there ain't enough of it," today's Navy has many of the best things available in the equipment field, but here, too, there "ain't enough of it" to go around—even when adequately maintained by our overworked and under-experienced sailors.

In general, the Fleet is worn out—or improperly designed, or both. I saw some indication of this when I stood on the quarterdeck of the USS *Taussig* (DD-746) in May 1969 and observed the ceremony celebrating the 25th anniversary of the commissioning of the ship named after my grandfather.

The ship was preparing to deploy to Vietnam as a "first-class fighting ship." Old, decrepit, and creaking, she was held together by the marvelous combination of zeal and ingenuity which the youth of America exhibit when saddled with a tough situation. On every "planning and tactical" document we had in the Pacific Fleet, this ship was considered to be a "vital link"

in our antisubmarine warfare defenses. Her guns could still shoot, and her tired old engines could take her from here to there—but a first-class fighting ship she was not.

In July of 1972, the "last of the *Taussigs*," the *Joseph K. Taussig* (DE-1030), was stricken from the lists. Unlike the vessel named after my grandfather, the ship named after my father had not simply died of old age, but from miserable technical planning. The *Joseph K. Taussig*, was, in fact, only 12 years old when stricken. The problem with this vessel was that she had only one engine, and this had proven too great a handicap in her performance of the ASW mission. (Somehow or other, the much-criticized DE-1052 class, as discussed in the *Proceedings* of March 1971, has exactly the same handicap.)

While two ships do not make an entire fleet, the two ships span the gamut of the "numbers game" which has so enamored the Navy Department and Congress for so many years and distressed the Operating Forces. While on the active lists, both ships were considered as first-line vessels—simply because they were "there." We attributed capabilities to them just as we attributed capabilities to the *Nevada's* AA batteries at Pearl Harbor. When stricken, the ships left without much sense of tactical loss, since they were either worn out or improperly designed in the first place.

We place the lives of young Americans—indeed, these are the only worthy considerations there are—in ships; and we plan to fight these ships according to the various contingency plans in our strategic documents. The men, most likely, will acquit themselves as well or better than the men who fought at Pearl Harbor. It is the ships, not the men, that are likely to be found wanting.

That either should ever again be found wanting is a monstrous insult to those who fell—many never to rise again, as my country and I were able to do—at Pearl Harbor.

A graduate of the U. S. Naval Academy in the Class of 1941, Captain Taussig was wounded at Pearl Harbor 7 December 1941 while serving in the USS *Nevada* (BB-36). In 1949, he graduated from George Washington Law School. From 1952 to 1954, while Senior Instructor in Military Law at the U. S. Naval Academy, he assumed collateral duty as Secretary-Treasurer of the U. S. Naval Institute. After retirement from active duty, he stayed on at the Naval Institute as Executive Secretary for two years. In 1956, he went to Westinghouse Air Arm as Senior Engineer, Advanced Development Engineering; in 1958, he became Corporate Representative, The Raytheon Company. He was Director, Government Relations, Joy Manufacturing Company, when, in 1962, he established Taussig-Tomb & Associates, a consulting and representative firm in Washington, D.C. He is a Director of the Retired Officers Association.