

2 Mitsuo Fuchida, "The Attack on Pearl Harbor," in The Japanese Navy in World War II (Annapolis: US Naval Inst Press, 1969), 16-27

THE ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR

An eyewitness account of an event often provides insights for which there is no substitute. On the other hand, such reports often suffer from a kind of myopia which results in a distortion of the actual situation. In the following selection, Captain Fuchida presents a highly personal but comprehensive description of the tactical aspects of the daring raid on the U.S. fleet and installations at Pearl Harbor. Although troubled by doubts as to the wisdom of the operation, he threw himself wholeheartedly into the task and worked devotedly to overcome the technical difficulties that at times seemed insuperable.

The narrative portrays the participant's anxieties and his feeling of relief as successive anticipated obstacles failed to materialize and it appeared that fate, providence, or chance had conspired to provide every opportunity for success. Morale of officers and men, excellent at the start, improved with each favorable omen and anticipation mounted to a fever pitch as the task force approached its target. Yet not until the final moment was Captain Fuchida able to feel "the bitterness of war," that extra motive which has inspired men to almost superhuman performance in battle.

Errors in execution during the bombing runs, primarily due to faulty communica-

tions, apparently had little effect on the outcome. Defects in formation and approach should have been foreseen and could not be modified after they were detected, and these shortcomings in planning and implementation could have proved fatal if confronted with a more alert adversary. And the merits of another strike, as urged by Captain Fuchida and others but rejected by Admiral Nagumo for understandable if not overwhelming reasons, continue to be debated. But it became evident that never again would the Imperial Japanese Navy have such a rare opportunity to administer a real death blow to the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

FUCHIDA

1969



18

IN SEPTEMBER, 1941, I was transferred from the staff of the Third Carrier Division to aircraft carrier *Akagi*, a position I had left just one year earlier. Shortly after joining my old comrades in *Akagi*, I was given additional duty as commander of all air groups of the First Air Fleet. This was an assignment beyond all my dreams. I felt that some thing big must be afoot.

It was at Kagoshima on the southern tip of Kyushu that I first learned the magnitude of events in store for me. My good friend Commander Genda, air operations officer on the staff of the First Air Fleet, came to see me at the air base and said, "Now don't be alarmed, Fuchida, but we want you to lead our air force in the event that we attack Pearl Harbor!"

Don't be alarmed? It was all I could do to catch my breath, and almost before I had done so we were on our way out to board *Akagi*, then anchored in Ariake Bay, for a conference with First Air Fleet commander, Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, and his staff, including Chief of Staff, Rear Admiral Ryunosuke Kusaka.

The more I heard about the plan the more astonishing it seemed. Genda kept urging that torpedoes be used against ships in Pearl Harbor; a feat that seemed next to impossible in view of the water depth of only twelve meters, and the harbor being not more than five hundred meters in width. When I pointed this out, Genda merely grew more aggressive, insisting that if we could launch torpedoes, they would not be expected, it would add to the surprise of the attack and multiply their effectiveness. This line of argument won me over, and, despite the technical difficulties that would have to be overcome, I agreed to include torpedoes in our attack plans.

Shallow-water torpedo launching was not the only difficult problem I had to cope with. From ordinary fleet practice we had to shift our energies to specific training for this all-important mission calling for vast and intensive preparations; and, what is more, everything had to be done in haste. It was already late September, and the attack plan called for execution in December!

There was no time to lose. Our fliers had

to work at the hardest kind of training. An added handicap to our efforts lay in the fact that, for security reasons, the pilots could not be told about the plans. Our progress was slow, especially with the problem of launching torpedoes in shallow water. Against my will I had to demand more and more of every man, yet none complained. They seemed to sense the intensification of the international situation and gave of themselves unquestioningly.

It was not until early November that the torpedo problem was finally solved by fixing additional fins to the torpedoes, and then my greatest worry was over. I was indeed proud of my men and felt honored to be their commander and participate in this great attack.

In mid-November First Air Fleet planes were taken on board their respective carriers which then headed for the Kuriles, traveling singly and taking separate courses to avoid attention. By the 22nd the entire force had assembled in isolated Tankan Bay on Etorofu, second island from the southern end of the chain extending northeast from Hokkaido. This force consisted of carriers *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Soryu*, *Hiryu*, *Shokaku*, *Zuihaku*; battleships *Hiei*, *Kirishima*; heavy cruisers *Tone*, *Chikuma*; light cruiser *Abukuma*; destroyers *Urakaze*, *Isokaze*, *Tanikaze*, *Hamakaze*, *Kazumi*, *Arare*, *Kagero*, *Shiranuhi*, *Akigumo*; submarines *I-19*, *I-21*, *I-23*; and tankers *Kyokulo Maru*, *Kenyo Maru*, *Kokuyo Maru*, *Shinkoku Maru*, *Akebono Maru*, *Toho Maru*, *Toei Maru*, and *Nihon Maru*.

The following order was issued from Tokyo on the day that *Akagi* sailed into Tankan Bay:

Imperial General Headquarters
Navy Order No. 5

21 November 1941

To: Commander in Chief Combined Fleet Iso-
roku Yamamoto
Via: Chief of Naval General Staff Osami Nagano
By Imperial Order

1. Commander in Chief Combined Fleet will, at an appropriate time, dispatch to stand-by points necessary forces for execution of operations.

2. Commander in Chief Combined Fleet is em-

powered to use force in self defense fleet is challenged by American, British forces during the process of carrying preparations.

3. Detailed instructions will be given by Chief of the Naval General Staff.

Four days later Admiral Yamamoto cordingly issued an operation order for his flagship *Nagato* at Hiroshima. Admiral Nagumo, in command of Harbor Attack Force:

The Task Force will leave Tankan Bay on November and, making every effort to move, advance to the stand-by point. Fueling will be quickly completed.

The designated stand-by point is 170°W, over a thousand miles to the west of the Hawaiian Island chain.

At 0600* on the dark and cloudy night of 26 November our 28-ship Task Force weighed anchor and sailed out into the North Pacific Ocean. The operation was cloaked in complete secrecy. A guard boat patrolling the bay entrance flashed "Good luck on your mission." The guard boat was unaware of our presence. *Akagi* signalled, "Thanks," and her ensign fluttering in the morning breeze. It would not be long before this replaced by a combat flag.

But this did not mean that the Task Force was already gone from the bow. "In contact with the U. S. fleet," a report reached a conclusion," Nagumo had been "the task force will put about in the area and return to the homeland." In this, however, the crews shouted as they took what might be their last look at Japan.

On *Akagi's* bridge Commanding Officer Miura, the navigation officer, was directing all his energies on controlling the ship. Whether we reached the launching point successfully rested upon his shoulders. So tense was the atmosphere that it made us feel he was a different man. His usual jovial at-

* East Longitude dates, Tokyo time (Z used primarily here; with West Longitude, Hawaiian time (Zone plus 10½) given in parentheses).

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; light cruiser *Abu-*
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cordingly issued an operation order from
his flagship *Nagato* at Hiroshima to Vice
Admiral Nagumo, in command of the Pearl
Harbor Attack Force:

The Task Force will leave Tankan Bay on 26
November and, making every effort to conceal its
movement, advance to the stand-by point, where
fueling will be quickly completed.

The designated stand-by point was 42°N
170°W, over a thousand miles to the north
of the Hawaiian Island chain.

At 0600* on the dark and cloudy morning
of 26 November our 28-ship task force
weighed anchor and sailed out into the waters
of the North Pacific Ocean. The sortie was
cloaked in complete secrecy. A patrol boat
guarding the bay entrance flashed a message,
"Good luck on your mission." But even that
boat was unaware of our assignment. *Akagi*
signalled, "Thanks," and passed by, her
ensign fluttering in the morning breeze. It
would not be long before this ensign was
replaced by a combat flag.

But this did not mean that the arrow had
already gone from the bow. "In case negoti-
ations with the U. S. reach a successful
conclusion," Nagumo had been instructed,
"the task force will put about immediately
and return to the homeland." Unaware of
this, however, the crews shouted "Banzai!"
as they took what might be their last look at
Japan.

On *Akagi's* bridge Commander Gishiro
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disappeared. He now wore shoes instead of
his usual slippers, and he was neatly dressed,
a decided change from his customary dirty,
worn-out uniform. Captain Hasegawa, the
skipper of the ship, stood beside him. Sitting
at the flight desk control post under the
bridge, I watched the gradually receding
mountains of the Kuriles.

Young boys of the flying crews were
boiling over with fighting spirit. Hard nights
and days of training had been followed by
hasty preparations, and now the sortie,
which meant that they were going to war.

I felt their keen enthusiasm and was
reassured. Still I could not help doubting
whether Japan had the proper confidence for
carrying out a war. At the same time, how-
ever, I fully realized my duty as a warrior
to fight and win victory for my country.

Personally I was opposed to the opera-
tional policy. The idea of an attack on Pearl
harbor was a good one, but I thought the
plan should have called for complete destruc-
tion of the United States Pacific Fleet at
the outset, followed by an invasion of the
Hawaiian Islands to push America entirely
out of the Central Pacific. The plan covered
expansion to the south—the Philippines,
Malaya, Hongkong, Guam, and other such
vulnerable positions. It was my opinion that
if Pacific operations to the east proved suc-
cessful, there would be no need for military
operations in the south.

Since the United States was the main foe,
I could not understand why operations were
not aimed directly toward the east. Admiral
Yamamoto was quoted as having said that
he had no confidence in the outcome of war
after the first year. Why then, did he not
press and press the enemy in the first year
to force an early conclusion to the war?
Anyway, the immediate mission was to
strike a telling blow, and my assignment
carried a grave responsibility. At the time I
thought, "Who could be luckier than I?"

My thoughts continued: What if the Fleet
is not in Pearl Harbor? In such a case we
would seek out the enemy en route to the
attack. If we should meet the enemy tomor-
row would Nagumo withdraw? No, we
should attack and destroy him, I thought,
and if the Admiral showed any hesitation, I
would volunteer my views on these matters.

Such thoughts came one after another, but
one remained uppermost. I was determined
to do my utmost for victory.

In the meantime, the fleet had assumed
formation. The carriers sailed in parallel
columns of three followed by the tankers.
On the outside two battleships and two
heavy cruisers took positions, the whole
group encircled by a screen of the light
cruiser and destroyers. The submarines pat-
rolled about 200 miles ahead of our force.
The course was direct to the stand-by point,
speed was fourteen knots. The first fueling at
sea was carried out five days after our sortie,
on 30 November.

Since our departure from Tankan Bay, a
strict alert had been kept against U. S. sub-
marines. Our course was chosen to pass be-
tween the Aleutians and Midway Island so
as to keep out of range of air patrols, some
of which were supposed to extend 600 miles.
Another concern during the cruise was how
to avoid a chance meeting with foreign
merchant ships. The three submarines
sent ahead of the fleet were to report any
ships sighted to the fleet, which would then
alter course to avoid them.

If an enemy fleet was sighted before X-2
day, our force was to reverse course immedi-
ately and abandon the operation. On the
other hand, if it was one day before X day,
whether to reverse course or launch the at-
tack was left to the discretion of the task
force commander.

Meanwhile, deceptive measures were being
taken elsewhere to cover up our movements.
On 5, 6, and 7 December sailors of the
Yokosuka Naval Barracks were sent to
Tokyo on a sightseeing tour. In early
December *Tatsuta Maru* of the N.Y.K. Line
had even left Yokohama heading for
Honolulu, and she reversed course only
upon receipt of the news that hostilities had
begun.

Since leaving Tankan Bay we had main-
tained our eastward course in complete
secrecy, thanks to thick, low-hanging clouds.
Moreover, on 30 November, 6 and 7 Decem-
ber, the sea, which we feared might be rough,
was calm enough for easy fueling. The not-
too-rough sea also made it easy to maintain
and prepare planes, and gave the men, espe-

Complete
secrecy!

Complete
secrecy

20

cially the flying crews, a much needed chance to relax.

The fleet observed strict radio silence, but concentrated on listening for broadcasts from Tokyo or Honolulu. Our predominant concern was to catch any word about the outbreak of war.

In Tokyo a liaison conference between the Government and the High Command was held every day from 27 to 30 November to discuss the U. S. proposal of the 26th. It was concluded that the proposal was an ultimatum tending to subjugate Japan and making war inevitable. At the liaison conference of the 30th the decision was made to go to war. This conference also concluded that a message declaring the end of negotiations be sent to the U. S., but that efforts be continued to the last moment. The final decision for war was made at an Imperial Conference on 1 December.

Next day the General Staff issued the long-awaited order and our task force received the Combined Fleet dispatch of 1730 which said, "X Day will be 8 December."

Now the die was cast and our duty was clear. The fleet drove headlong to the east.

Why was 8 December chosen as X day? That was 7 December and Sunday, a day of rest, in Hawaii. Was this merely a bright idea to hit the U. S. Fleet off duty? No, it was not so simple as that. This day for the opening of hostilities had been coordinated with the time of the Malayan operations, where air raids and landings were scheduled for dawn. Favorable moonlight was a major consideration, three or four days after the full moon being the most desirable time, and on 8 December the moon was 19 days old.

There was another reason for choosing 8 December. Our information indicated that the fleet returned to harbor on weekends after training periods at sea, so there was great likelihood that it would be in Pearl Harbor on Sunday morning. All things considered, 8 December was the logical day for the attack.

Long before the planning of the Pearl Harbor attack we had been interested in fleet activities in the Hawaiian area. Our information showed:

1. The fleet either went out on Tuesday and re-

turned on Friday, or went out on Friday and returned on Saturday of the next week. In either case, it stayed in harbor about a week. When it went out for two weeks, it would usually return by Sunday.

2. The fleet trained to the southeast of Pearl Harbor. Intercepted radio messages from planes flying between this training area and Pearl Harbor showed that these planes were in flight for forty to sixty minutes. Accordingly, the training area was estimated to be near Maui, and probably north of 19°N latitude.

3. It was hard to determine whether the fleet put in to any other port during training periods, and if so, where. There were some indications that it might go to Lahaina or Marlaea for a short while.

After Japan's decision to go to war had been sent to the Attack Force, intelligence reports on U. S. Fleet activities continued to be relayed to us from Tokyo. The information was thorough, but the news was often delayed two or three days in reaching Tokyo. These reports from Imperial General Staff were generally as follows:

Issued 2200, 2 December; received 0017, 3 December

Activities in Pearl Harbor as of 0800/28 November:

Departed: 2 BB (*Oklahoma* and *Nevada*), 1 CV (*Enterprise*), 2 CA, 12 DD.

Arrived: 5 BB, 3 CA, 3 CL, 12 DD, 1 tanker.

Ships making port today are those which departed 22 November.

Ships in port on afternoon of 28 November estimated as follows:

6 BB (2 *Maryland* class, 2 *California* class, 2 *Pennsylvania* class)

1 CV (*Lexington*)

9 CA (5 *San Francisco* class, 3 *Chicago* class, and *Salt Lake City*)

5 CL (4 *Honolulu* class and *Omaha*)

Issued 2300, 3 December; received 0035, 4 December

Ships present Pearl Harbor on afternoon of 29 November:

District A (between Naval Yard and Ford Island)

KT (docks northwest of Naval Yard): *Pennsylvania* and *Arizona*

FV (mooring pillars): *California*, *Tennessee*, *Maryland*, and *West Virginia*

KS (naval yard repair dock): *Portland*

In docks: 2 CA, 1 DD

Elsewhere: 4 SS, 1 DD tender, 2 patrol ships, 2 tankers, 2 repair ships, 1 minesweeper

District B (sea area northwest of Ford Island)

FV (mooring pillars): *Lexington*

Elsewhere: *Utah*, 1 CA (*San Francisco* class), 2 CL (*Omaha* class), 3 gunboats

District C (East Loch)

3 CA, 2 CL (*Honolulu* class), 17 DD, 2 DD tenders

District D (Middle Loch)

12 minesweepers

District E (West Loch)

No ships

No changes observed by afternoon of 2 December. So far they do not seem to have been alerted. Shore leaves as usual.

Issued 2030, 4 December; received 0420, 5 December

So far no indications of sea patrol flights being conducted. It seems that occasional patrols are being made to Palmyra, Johnston and Midway Islands. Pearl Harbor patrols unknown.

Issued 2200, 6 December; received 1036, 7 December

Activities in Pearl Harbor on the morning of 5 December:

Arrived: *Oklahoma* and *Nevada* (having been out for eight days)

Departed: *Lexington* and five heavy cruisers

Ships in harbor as of 1800, 5 December:

8 BB, 3 CL, 16 DD

In docks: 4 CL (*Honolulu* class), 5 DD

Issued 1700, 7 December; received 1900, 7 December

No balloons, no torpedo-defense nets deployed around battleships. No indications observed from enemy radio activity that ocean patrol flights are being made in Hawaiian area. *Lexington* left harbor yesterday (5 December, local time) and recovered planes. *Enterprise* is also thought to be operating at sea with her planes on board.

Issued 1800, 7 December; received 2050, 7 December

Utah and a seaplane tender entered harbor in the evening of 5 December. (They had left harbor on 4 December.)

Ships in harbor as of 6 December:

9 BB, 3 CL, 3 seaplane tenders, 17 DD

In docks: 4 CL, 3 DD

All carriers and heavy cruisers are at sea. No special reports on the fleet. Oahu is quiet and Imperial General Staff is fully convinced of success.

These reports presumably from Honolulu, but I do not know details.

On 6 December after fueling the Screening Force, the 2nd Fleet broke off from the task force. On the day the 1st Tanker Train fueled again and departed. Our force then increased speed to 24 knots and raced for Pearl Harbor. On the carrier decks lined up wing to wing for their maintenance crews and flying assiduously to complete final preparations for their planes.

About this time we received Yamamoto's message for go to war. "The rise or fall of the Empire depends on this battle; everyone will do his utmost efforts." The message was immediately relayed to all hands, and was hoisted on *Akagi's* mast. The same signal flag that was run almost thirty years before in 1897 at Tsushima.

At 1225 on the 7th (1725, 6 December, Honolulu) a message came in from the marine *I-72*: "American Fleet in Lahaina Anchorage."

This anchorage was used because it was open and deep. The Fleet was there, it would have the best chance for success, and was accordingly. Receipt of the news was a matter of opportunity, however, blasted our hope for an opportunity.

It was now obvious that the ships were either in Pearl Harbor or at sea. Admiral Nagumo was thumbing through his message log to check on battleships to be in Pearl Harbor. Counting on the count, he looked up and said to his members, "All of their battleships are in. Will any of them leave today?"

The Intelligence Officer, Lieutenant Commander Ono, was first to reply to their eight battleships reacting on the 29th, and two others left on the 6th, there is one ship which has remained in harbor all the time, possibly under repair, or perhaps docked. The five ships which arrived on the 29th have been there eight days. I suspect time for them to leave. I suspect

SS. 1 DD tender, 2 patrol ships,
 2 repair ships, 1 minesweeper
 sea area northwest of Ford Island)
 (wing pillars): Lexington
 CA (San Francisco class),
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About this time we received Admiral Yamamoto's message for going to war: "The rise or fall of the Empire depends upon this battle; everyone will do his duty with utmost efforts." The message was immediately relayed to all hands, and the "Z" flag was hoisted on Akagi's mast. This was the same signal flag that was run up in Mikasa almost thirty years before in the Straits of Tsushima.

At 1225 on the 7th (1725, 6 December in Honolulu) a message came in from submarine I-72: "American Fleet is not in Lahaina Anchorage."

This anchorage was used for training because it was open and deep. If the Pacific Fleet was there, it would have offered our best chance for success, and we had hoped accordingly. Receipt of the negative information, however, blasted our hopes for such an opportunity.

It was now obvious that the warships were either in Pearl Harbor or at sea. Admiral Nagumo was thumbing through the message log to check on battleships reported to be in Pearl Harbor. Completing the count, he looked up and said to the staff members, "All of their battleships are now in. Will any of them leave today?"

The Intelligence Officer, Lieutenant Commander Ono, was first to reply: "Since five of their eight battleships reached port on the 29th, and two others left that day returning on the 6th, there is one more which has remained in harbor all this time, supposedly under repair, or perhaps in dry dock. The five ships which arrived on the 29th have been there eight days, and it is time for them to leave. I suspect they may

go out today."

"Today is Saturday, 6 December," said Chief of Staff Kusaka. "Their general practice is to leave on Tuesday, which would be the 9th."

"It is most regrettable," said Genda, the Operations Officer, "that no carriers are in."

"On 29 November," Ono explained, "Enterprise left harbor accompanied by two battleships, two heavy cruisers and twelve destroyers. The two battleships returned on the 6th, but the rest have not yet come back. Lexington came in on the 29th and left with five heavy cruisers on the 6th. Thus, Enterprise ought to return today. Saratoga is under repair at San Diego, and Wasp is in the Atlantic. But Yorktown and Hornet belonging to the Pacific Fleet must be out here. They may have arrived with Enterprise today."

"If that happens," said Genda, "I don't care if all eight of the battleships are away."

"As an air man," remarked Oishi, "you naturally place much importance on carriers. Of course it would be good if we could get three of them, but I think it would be better if we get all eight of the battleships."

Chief of Staff Kusaka, who had always been strong for statistical studies of the U. S. Pacific Fleet, now spoke, "There is only a slight chance that carriers may enter the harbor on Saturday, and it seems unlikely that the battleships would leave on Saturday or Sunday. We may take it for granted that all eight battleships will be in the harbor tomorrow. We can't do anything about carriers that are not there. I think we should attack Pearl Harbor tomorrow."

Thus he set the stage for the decision of the task force commander, which was made known in the evening of the 7th when Admiral Nagumo gave his appraisal of the enemy situation:

1. Enemy strength in the Hawaiian area consists of eight battleships, two carriers, about ten heavy and six light cruisers. The carriers and heavy cruisers seem to be at sea, but the others are in the harbor. Those operating at sea are most likely in the training area south of Maui; they are not in Lahaina.

2. Unless an unforeseen situation develops tonight, our attack will be launched upon Pearl Harbor.

Carriers
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3. So far there is no indication that the enemy has been alerted, but that is no reason to relax our security.

At 0530, 7 December,* Chikuma and Tone each catapulted a "Zero" float plane for a pre-attack reconnaissance of Pearl Harbor. On carrier flight decks readied fighter and attack planes were lined up. The flying crews, also primed for the operation, were gathered in the briefing room. The ships pitched and rolled in the rough sea, kicking up white surf from the pre-dawn blackness of the water. At times wave spray came over the flight deck, and crews clung desperately to their planes to keep them from going into the sea.

In my flying togs I entered the operation room and reported to the Commander in Chief, "I am ready for the mission." Nagumo stood up, grasped my hand firmly and said, "I have confidence in you." He followed me to the dimly lit briefing room where Akagi's Captain was waiting with the pilots. The room was not large enough for all of the men, some of whom had to stand out in the passageway. On a blackboard were written the positions of ships in Pearl Harbor as of 0600, 7 December. We were 230 miles due north of Oahu.

Calling the men to attention, I saluted Captain Hasegawa, who spoke a brief final order, "Take off according to plan."

The crews went out hurriedly to their waiting planes. Last to leave, I climbed to the flight deck command post where Genda put his hand on my shoulder. We smiled without speaking, knowing well each other's thoughts.

Turning to me, Air Officer Masuda said, "There is a heavy pitch and roll. What do you think about taking off in the dark?" The sea was rough, and there was a strong wind blowing. The sky was completely dark, and as yet the horizon was not visible.

"The pitch is greater than the roll," I replied. "Were this a training flight, the take-off would be delayed until dawn. But if we coordinate the take-offs with the pitching we can launch successfully." I saluted the

* West Longitude date and Hawaiian (Zone plus 10) time used hereinafter.

officers and went to my plane, the tail of which was striped with red and yellow to distinguish it as the commander's.

The senior petty officer of the maintenance gang handed me a white *hachimaki* (cloth headband) saying, "This is a present from the maintenance crews. May I ask that you take it along to Pearl Harbor?" I nodded and fastened the gift to my flying cap.

The carrier turned to port and headed into the northerly wind. The battle flag was now added to the "Z" flag flying at the masthead. Lighted flying lamps shivered with the vibration of engines as planes completed their warm-up.

On the flight deck a green lamp was waved in a circle to signal "Take off!" The engine of the foremost fighter plane began to roar. With the ship still pitching and rolling, the plane started its run, slowly at first but with steadily increasing speed. Men lining the flight deck held their breath as the first plane took off successfully just before the ship took a downward pitch. The next plane was already moving forward. There were loud cheers as each plane rose into the air.

Thus did the first wave of 183 fighters, bombers, and torpedo planes take off from the six carriers. Within fifteen minutes they had all been launched and were forming up in the still-dark sky, guided only by signal lights of the lead planes. After one great circling over the fleet formation, the planes took course due south for Oahu Island and Pearl Harbor. It was 0615.

Under my direct command were 49 level bombers. About 500 meters to my right and slightly below me were 40 torpedo planes. The same distance to my left, but about 200 meters above me, were 51 dive bombers, and giving cover for the formation there were 43 fighters. These other three groups were led by Lieutenant Commanders Murata, Takashi, and Itaya, respectively.

We flew through and over the thick clouds which were at 2000 meters, up to where day was ready to dawn. And the clouds began gradually to brighten below us after the brilliant sun burst into the eastern sky. I opened the cockpit canopy and looked back at the large formation of planes. The

wings glittered in the bright morning sunlight.

The speedometer indicated 125 knots and we were favored by a tail wind. At 0700 I figured that we should reach Oahu in less than an hour. But flying over the clouds we could not see the surface of the water, and, consequently, had no check on our drift. I switched on the radio-direction finder to tune in the Honolulu radio station and soon picked up some light music. By turning the antenna I found the exact direction from which the broadcast was coming and corrected our course, which had been five degrees off.

Continuing to listen to the program, I was wondering how to get below the clouds after reaching Oahu. If the island was covered by thick clouds like those below us, the level bombing would be difficult; and we had not yet had reports from the reconnaissance planes.

In tuning the radio a little finer I heard, along with the music, what seemed to be a weather report. Holding my breath, I adjusted the dial and listened intently. Then I heard it come through a second time, slowly and distinctly: "Averaging partly cloudy, with clouds mostly over the mountains. Cloud base at 3500 feet. Visibility good. Wind north, 10 knots."

What a windfall for us! No matter how careful the planning, a more favorable situation could not have been imagined. Weather conditions over Pearl Harbor had been worrying me greatly, but now with this information I could turn my attention to other problems. Since Honolulu was only partly cloudy, there must be breaks in the clouds over the island. But since the clouds over the mountains were at 1000 meters altitude, it would not be wise to attack from the northeast, flying over the eastern mountains, as previously planned. The wind was north and visibility good. It would be better to pass to the west of the island and make our approach from the south.

At 1030 we had been in the air for about an hour and a half. It was time that we were seeing land, but there was only a solid layer of clouds below. All of a sudden the clouds broke, and a long white line of coast appeared. We were over Kahuku Point,

the northern tip of the island, and now it was time for our deployment.

There were alternate plans for the attack: If we had surprise, the torpedo planes were to strike first, followed by the level bombers and then the dive bombers, which were to attack the air bases including Hickam and Ford Island near the anchorage. If these bases were first hit by the dive bombers, it was feared that the resultant smoke might hinder torpedo and level-bombing attacks on the ships.

On the other hand, if enemy resistance was expected, the dive bombers would attack first to cause confusion and attract enemy fire. Level bombers, coming next, were to bomb and destroy enemy anti-aircraft guns, followed by the torpedo planes which would attack the ships.

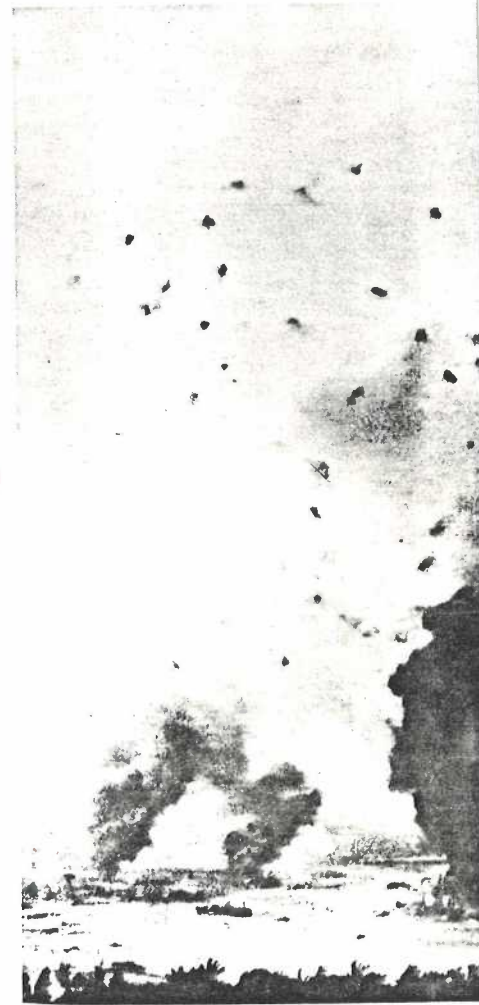
The selection of attack method was for my decision, to be indicated by signal pistol: one "black dragon" for a surprise attack, two "black dragons" if it appeared that surprise was lost. Upon either order the fighters were immediately to dash in as cover.

There was still no news from the reconnaissance planes, but I had made up my mind that we could make a surprise attack, and thereupon ordered the deployment by raising my signal pistol outside the canopy and firing one "black dragon." The time was 0740.

With this order dive bombers rose to 4000 meters, torpedo bombers went down almost to sea level, and level bombers came down just under the clouds. The only group that failed to deploy was the fighters. Flying above the rest of the formation, they seemed to have missed the signal because of the clouds. Realizing this I fired another shot toward the fighter group. This time they noticed the signal immediately and sped toward Oahu.

This second shot, however, was taken by the commander of the dive bomber group as the second of two "black dragons," signifying a non-surprise attack which would mean that his group should attack first, and this error served to confuse some of the pilots who had understood the original signal.

Meanwhile a reconnaissance report came



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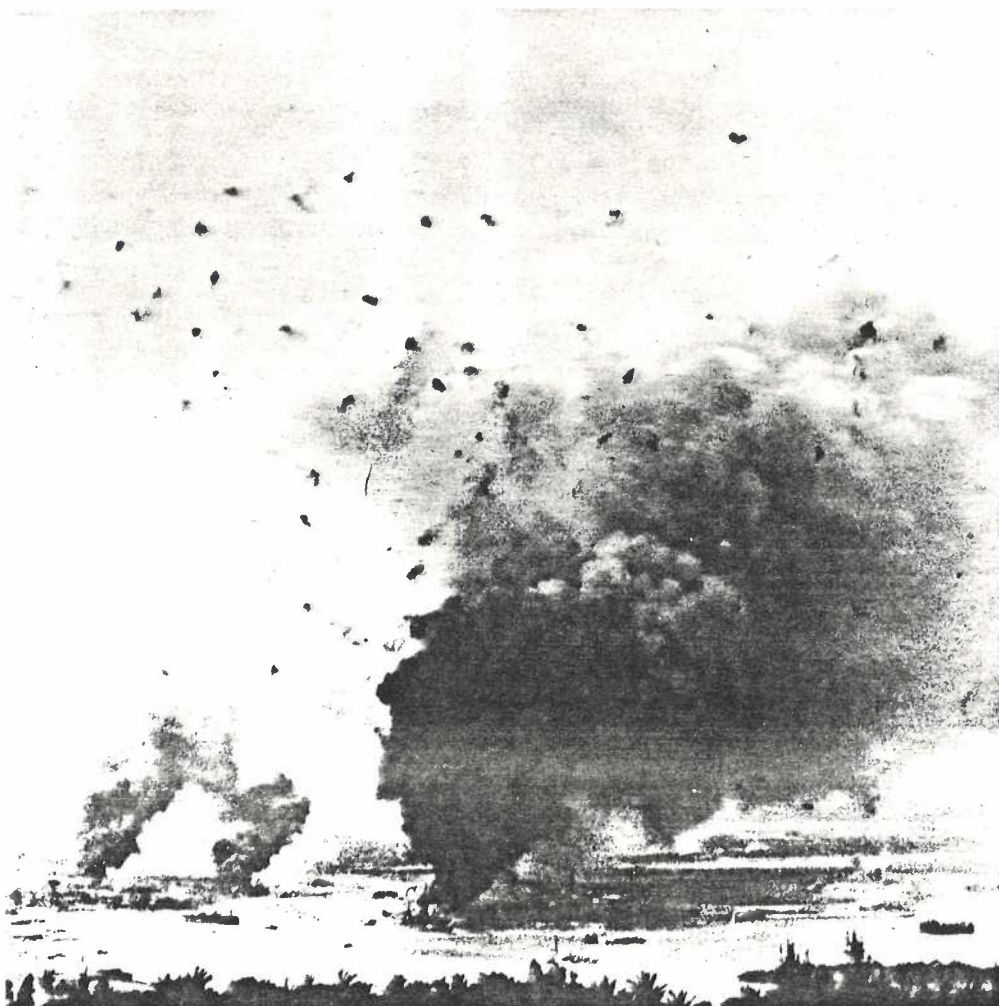
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There was still no news from the reconnaissance planes, but I had made up my mind that we could make a surprise attack, and thereupon ordered the deployment by firing my signal pistol outside the canopy of my first plane "black dragon." The time was 0749.

With this order dive bombers rose to 4000 feet, torpedo bombers went down almost level, and level bombers came down under the clouds. The only group that failed to deploy was the fighters. Flying with the rest of the formation, they seemed to have missed the signal because of the clouds. Realizing this I fired another shot and ordered the fighter group. This time they obeyed the signal immediately and sped toward Oahu.

His second shot, however, was taken by the commander of the dive bomber group firing the second of two "black dragons," indicating a non-surprise attack which would mean that his group should attack first, and this error served to confuse some of the pilots who had understood the original signal. Meanwhile a reconnaissance report came

As the attack continued, navy anti-aircraft guns put up a barrage. Heavy smoke is from battleship row.



in from *Chikuma's* plane giving the locations of ten battleships, one heavy cruiser, and ten light cruisers in the harbor. It also reported a 14-meter wind from bearing 080, and clouds over the U. S. Fleet at 1700 meters with a scale 7 density. The *Tone* plane also reported that "the enemy fleet is not in Lahaina Anchorage." Now I knew for sure that there were no carriers in the harbor. The sky cleared as we moved in on the target and Pearl Harbor was plainly visible from the northwest valley of the island. I studied our objective through binoculars. They were there all right, all eight of them. "Notify all planes to launch attacks," I ordered my radio man who immediately began tapping the key. The order went in plain code: "To, to, to, to. . ." The time was 0749.

When Lieutenant Commander Takahashi and his dive-bombing group mistook my signal, and thought we were making a non-surprise attack, his 53 planes lost no time in dashing forward. His command was divided into two groups: one led by himself which headed for Ford Island and Hickam Field, the other, led by Lieutenant Sakamoto, headed for Wheeler Field.

The dive bombers over Hickam Field saw heavy bombers lined up on the apron. Takahashi rolled his plane sharply and went into a dive, followed immediately by the rest of his planes, and the first bombs fell at Hickam. The next places hit were Ford Island and Wheeler Field. In a very short time huge billows of black smoke were rising from these bases. The lead torpedo planes were to have started their run to the Navy Yard from over Hickam, coming from south of the bay entrance. But the sudden burst of bombs at Hickam surprised Lieutenant Commander Murata who had understood that his torpedo planes were to have attacked first. Hence he took a short cut lest the smoke from those bases cover up his targets. Thus the first torpedo was actually launched some five minutes ahead of the scheduled 0800. The time of each attack was as follows:

- 0755 Dive bombers at Hickam and Wheeler
- 0757 Torpedo planes at battleships
- 0800 Fighters strafing air bases
- 0805 Level bombers at battleships

0749

0755

After issuance of the attack order, my level bomber group kept east of Oahu going past the southern tip of the island. On our left was the Barbers Point airfield, but, as we had been informed, there were no planes. Our information indicated that a powerful anti-aircraft battery was stationed there, but we saw no evidence of it.

I continued to watch the sky over the harbor and activities on the ground. None but Japanese planes were in the air, and there were no indications of air combat. Ships in the harbor still appeared to be asleep, and the Honolulu radio broadcast continued normally. I felt that surprise was now assured, and that my men would succeed in their missions.

Knowing that Admirals Nagumo, Yamamoto, and the General Staff were anxious about the attack, I decided that they should be informed. I ordered the following message sent to the fleet: "We have succeeded in making a surprise attack. Request you relay this report to Tokyo." The radio man reported shortly that the message had been received by *Akagi*.

The code for a successful surprise attack was "Tora, tora, tora..." Before *Akagi's* relay of this message reached Japan, it was received by *Nagato* in Hiroshima Bay and the General Staff in Tokyo, directly from my plane! This was surely a long-distance record for such a low-powered transmission from an airplane, and might be attributed to the use of the word "*Tora*" as our code. There is a Japanese saying, "A tiger (*tora*) goes out 1000 *ri* (2000 miles) and returns without fail."

I saw clouds of black smoke rising from Hickam and soon thereafter from Ford Island. This bothered me and I wondered what had happened. It was not long before I saw waterspouts rising alongside the battleships, followed by more and more waterspouts. It was time to launch our level bombing attacks so I ordered my pilot to bank sharply, which was the attack signal for the planes following us. All ten of my squadrons then formed into a single column with intervals of 200 meters. It was indeed a gorgeous formation.

The lead plane in each squadron was manned by a specially trained pilot and

U. S. battleships under air attack at Pearl Harbor, as photographed by a Japanese pilot.



bombardier. The pilot and bomber squadron had won numerous victories and were considered the best in the Navy. I approved when Lieutenant Zaki asked if the lead plane could take positions with us, and he lifted a little as a signal. The new lead plane moved forward quickly, and I could see the round face of the bombardier salute. In returning the salute, I gave the command to them for their mission.

As my group made its bomb run, anti-aircraft suddenly came up. Gray bursts blossomed here and there in the sky was clouded with shells and misses which made our position difficult. Shipboard guns seemed to open up on the shore batteries. I was struck by the rapidity of the counterattack. Less than five minutes after the attack had fallen. Were it the Japanese reaction would not have been because although the Japanese were suitable for offensives, it does not adjust to the defensive.

Suddenly the plane bounced by a huge club. "The fuselage port," reported the radio man "and a steering-control wire is asked hurriedly if the plane control, and the pilot assured me."

No sooner were we feeling another burst shook the plane. The plane was headed for *Nevada's* midship. At the northern end of battleship row on the side of Ford Island. We were over the bay entrance and it was time to release our bombs. It was a pass through the concentrated fire. Flying at only 3000 meters, that this might well be a date.

I further saw that it was not deployed in this long single-column. The whole level bomber group was destroyed like ducks in a shot. It would also have been better if we approached the targets from the Diamond Head. But here we were attacking the targets and there was a job to do.

It was now a matter of utmost importance to stay on course, and the lead

battleships under air attack at Pearl Harbor, as photographed by a Japanese

bombardier. The pilot and bombardier of my squadron had won numerous fleet contests and were considered the best in the Japanese Navy. I approved when Lieutenant Matsuzaki asked if the lead plane should trade positions with us, and he lifted our plane a little as a signal. The new leader came forward quickly, and I could see the smiling round face of the bombardier when he saluted. In returning the salute I entrusted the command to them for the bombing mission.

As my group made its bomb run, enemy anti-aircraft suddenly came to life. Dark gray bursts blossomed here and there until the sky was clouded with shattering near misses which made our plane tremble. Shipboard guns seemed to open fire before the shore batteries. I was startled by the rapidity of the counterattack which came less than five minutes after the first bomb had fallen. Were it the Japanese Fleet, the reaction would not have been so quick, because although the Japanese character is suitable for offensives, it does not readily adjust to the defensive.

Suddenly the plane bounced as if struck by a huge club. "The fuselage is holed to port," reported the radio man behind me, "and a steering-control wire is damaged." I asked hurriedly if the plane was under control, and the pilot assured me that it was.

No sooner were we feeling relieved than another burst shook the plane. My squadron was headed for Nevada's mooring at the northern end of battleship row on the east side of Ford Island. We were just passing over the bay entrance and it was almost time to release our bombs. It was not easy to pass through the concentrated anti-aircraft fire. Flying at only 3000 meters, it seemed that this might well be a date with eternity.

I further saw that it was not wise to have deployed in this long single-column formation. The whole level bomber group could be destroyed like ducks in a shooting gallery. It would also have been better if we had approached the targets from the direction of Diamond Head. But here we were at our targets and there was a job to be done.

It was now a matter of utmost importance to stay on course, and the lead plane kept

to its line of flight like a homing pigeon. Ignoring the barrage of shells bursting around us, I concentrated on the bomb loaded under the lead plane, pulled the safety bolt from the bomb release lever and grasped the handle. It seemed as if time was standing still.

Again we were shaken terrifically and our planes were buffeted about. When I looked out the third plane of my group was abreast of us and I saw its bomb fall! That pilot had a reputation for being careless. In training his bomb releases were poorly timed, and he had often been cautioned.

I thought, "That damn fellow has done it again!" and shook my fist in his direction. But I soon realized that there was something wrong with his plane and he was losing gasoline. I wrote on a small blackboard, "What happened?" and held it toward his plane. He explained, "Underside of fuselage hit."

Now I saw his bomb cinch lines fluttering wildly, and sorry for having scolded him, I ordered that he return to the carrier. He answered, "Fuel tank destroyed, will follow you," asking permission to stay with the group. Knowing the feelings of the pilot and crew, I gave the permission, although I knew it was useless to try taking that crippled and bombless plane through the enemy fire. It was nearly time for bomb release when we ran into clouds which obscured the target, and I made out the round face of the lead bombardier who was waving his hands back and forth to indicate that we had passed the release point. Banking slightly we turned right toward Honolulu, and I studied the anti-aircraft fire, knowing that we would have to run through it again. It was now concentrated on the second squadron.

While circling for another try, I looked toward the area in which the bomb from the third plane had fallen. Just outside the bay entrance I saw a large water ring close by what looked like a destroyer. The ship seemed to be standing in a floating dock, attached to both sides of the entrance like a gate boat. I was suddenly reminded of the midget submarines which were to have entered the bay for a special attack.

At the time of our sortie I was aware of

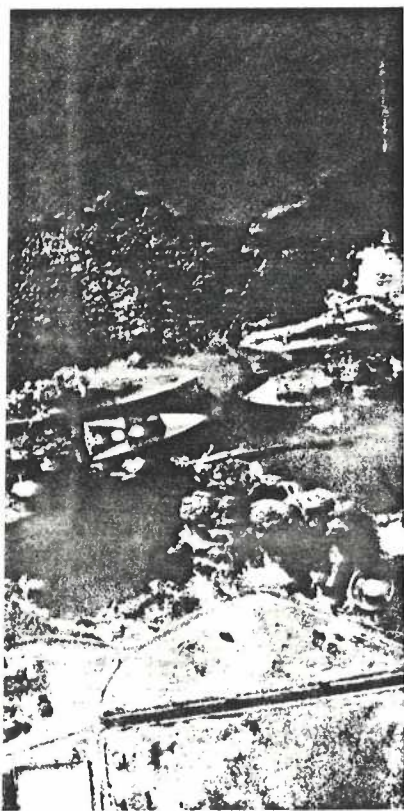
these midget submarines, but knew nothing of their characteristics, operational objectives, force organization, or the reason for their participation in the attack. In Akagi, Commander Shibuya, a staff officer in charge of submarine operations, had explained that they were to penetrate the harbor the night before our attack; but, no matter how good an opportunity might arise, they were not to strike until after the planes had done so.

Even now the submarines were probably concealed in the bay, awaiting the air attack. Had the entrance been left open, there would have been some opportunity for them to get out of the harbor. But in light of what I had just seen there seemed little chance of that, and, feeling now the bitterness of war, I vowed to do my best in the assigned mission.

While my group was circling over Honolulu for another bombing attempt, other groups made their runs, some making three tries before succeeding. Suddenly a colossal explosion occurred in battleship row. A huge column of dark red smoke rose to 1000 feet and a stiff shock wave reached our plane. I called the pilot's attention to the spectacle, and he observed, "Yes, Commander, the powder magazine must have exploded. Terrible indeed!" The attack was in full swing, and smoke from fires and explosions filled most of the sky over Pearl Harbor.

My group now entered on a bombing course again. Studying battleship row through binoculars, I saw that the big explosion had been on Arizona. She was still flaming fiercely and her smoke was covering Nevada, the target of my group. Since the heavy smoke would hinder our bomber accuracy, I looked for some other ship to attack. Tennessee, third in the left row, was already on fire; but next in row was Maryland, which had not yet been attacked. I gave an order changing our target to this ship, and once again we headed into the anti-aircraft fire. Then came the "ready" signal and I took a firm grip on the bomb release handle, holding my breath and staring at the bomb of the lead plane.

Pilots, observers, and radio men all shouted, "Release!" on seeing the bomb drop from the lead plane, and all the others



let go their bombs. I immediately lay flat on the floor to watch the fall of bombs through a peephole. Four bombs in perfect pattern plummeted like devils of doom. The target was so far away that I wondered for a moment if they would reach it. The bombs grew smaller and smaller until I was holding my breath for fear of losing them. I forgot everything in the thrill of watching the fall toward the target. They became small as poppy seeds and finally disappeared just as tiny white flashes of smoke appeared on and near the ship.

From a great altitude near misses are much more obvious than direct hits because they create wave rings in the water which are plain to see. Observing only two such rings plus two tiny flashes I shouted, "Two hits!" and rose from the floor of the plane. These minute flashes were the only evidence we had of hits at that time, but I felt sure that they had done considerable damage. I ordered the bombers which had completed their runs to return to the carriers, but my own plane remained over Pearl Harbor to observe our successes and conduct operations still in progress.

After our bomb run I ordered my pilot to fly over each of the air bases, where our fighters were strafing, before returning over Pearl Harbor to observe the result of our attacks on the warships. Pearl Harbor and vicinity had been turned into complete chaos in a very short time.

Target ship Utah, on the western side of Ford Island, had already capsized. On the other side of the island West Virginia and Oklahoma had received concentrated torpedo attacks as a result of their exposed positions in the outer row. Their sides were almost blasted off and they listed steeply in a flood of heavy oil. Arizona was in miserable shape, her magazine apparently having blown up, she was listing badly and burning furiously.

Two other battleships, Maryland and Tennessee, were on fire; especially the latter whose smoke emerged in a heavy black column which towered into the sky. Pennsylvania, unscathed in the drydock, seemed to be the only battleship that had not been attacked.

Most of our torpedo planes, under Lieutenant Commander Murata, flew around the Navy Yard area and concentrated their attacks on the ships moored east of Ford Island. A summary of their reports, made upon return to our carriers, indicated the following hits: one on Nevada, nine on West Virginia, twelve on Oklahoma, and three on California.

Elements of the torpedo bombers attacked ships west of the island, but they found only Utah and attacked her claiming six hits. Other torpedo planes headed for Pennsylvania, but seeing that she was in drydock they shifted their attack to a cruiser and destroyer tied up at Pier 1010. Five torpedo hits were claimed on these targets, which were Helena and Oglala.

As I observed the damage done by the first attack wave, the effectiveness of the torpedoes seemed remarkable, and I was struck with the shortsightedness of the United States in being so generally unprepared and in not using torpedo nets. I also thought of our long hard training in Kagoshima Bay and the efforts of those who had labored to accomplish a seemingly impossible task. A warm feeling came with the realization that the reward of those efforts was unfolded here before my eyes.

During the attack many of our pilots noted the brave efforts of the American flyers able to take off who, though greatly outnumbered, flew straight in to engage our planes. Their effect was negligible, but their courage commanded the admiration and respect of our pilots.

It took the planes of the first attack wave about one hour to complete their mission. By the time they were headed back to our carriers, having lost three fighters, one dive bomber, and five torpedo planes, the second wave of 171 planes commanded by Lieutenant Commander Shimazaki was over the target area. Arriving off Kahuku Point at 0840, the attack run was ordered 14 minutes later and they swept in, making every effort to avoid the billowing clouds of smoke as well as the now-intensified anti-aircraft fire.

In this second wave there were 36 fighters to control the air over Pearl Harbor, 54 high-level bombers led by Shimazaki to attack Hickam Field and the Naval Air

Stations at Kaneohe, while 81 dive bombers led by Lieutenant Commander Egusa flew over the mountains to the east and dashed in to hit the warships.

By the time these last arrived, the sky was so covered with clouds and smoke that planes had difficulty in locating their targets. To further complicate the problems of this attack, the ship and ground anti-aircraft fire was now very heavy. But Egusa was undaunted in leading his dive bombers through the fierce barrage. The planes chose as their targets the ships which were putting up the stiffest repelling fire. This choice proved effective since these ships had suffered least from the first attack. Thus the second attack achieved a nice spread, hitting the least damaged battleships as well as previously undamaged cruisers and destroyers. This attack also lasted about one hour, but due to the increased return fire, it suffered higher casualties: six fighters and fourteen dive bombers being lost.

After the second wave was headed back to the carriers, I circled Pearl Harbor once more to observe and photograph the results. I counted four battleships definitely sunk and three severely damaged. Still another battleship appeared to be slightly damaged and extensive damage had also been inflicted upon other type of ships. The seaplane base at Ford Island was all in flames, as were the airfields, especially Wheeler Field.

A detailed survey of damage was impossible because of the dense pall of black smoke. Damage to the airfields was not determinable, but it was readily apparent that no planes on the fields were operational. In the three hours that my plane was in the area we did not encounter a single enemy plane. It seemed that at least half the island's air strength must have been destroyed. Several hangars remained untouched, however, and it was possible that some of them held planes which were still operational.

Such were my conclusions as I prepared to return to our carrier. I was startled from these thoughts by the sudden approach of a fighter plane banking from side to side. We were greatly relieved to see the Rising Sun on its wings. As it came closer we saw that it was a Zuikaku fighter which must have been here since the first attack wave. I

wondered if any other fighters left behind, and ordered my pilot the rendezvous point for a fight. Sure enough, there we found a second plane who also followed joyfully. It was extremely difficult for fighters to fly long distances at sea. They were equipped with homing devices and were the larger planes. It was planned to have the bombers, upon completion of their missions, rendezvous with fighters at a designated point and back to the carriers. Some of them, however, such as these two, must have been at the time of rendezvous, and I indeed fortunate to find our pilots could lead them safely back to force and their carriers.

My plane was just about the time I got back to Akagi where reformed planes were being lined up on the busy flight deck in preparation for another attack. I was called to the carrier as soon as the plane stopped, and I told on arriving there that Admiral Nagumo's staff had been engaged in heated discussion about the advisability of launching another attack. They were waiting for me to give the word.

"Four battleships definitely sunk," reported. "One sank instantly, and the other two settled to the bottom of the bay and may have capsized." It seemed to please Admiral Nagumo to observe, "We may then conclude that anticipated results have been achieved."

Discussion next centered upon the damage inflicted at airfields and bases, and I expressed my view that "All things considered we have a great amount of destruction, but it is unwise to assume that we have destroyed everything. There are still many remaining which should be hit. I recommend that another attack be launched."

The factors which influenced Nagumo's decision—the target selection, the criticism by naval experts, and an incident which had been unknown, since the man who died in the summer of 1944 who

tions at Kaneohe, while 81 dive bombers by Lieutenant Commander Egusa flew to the mountains to the east and dashed to hit the warships.

By the time these last arrived, the sky was so covered with clouds and smoke that they had difficulty in locating their targets. This further complicated the problems of this attack, the ship and ground anti-aircraft was now very heavy. But Egusa was entrusted in leading his dive bombers through the fierce barrage. The planes chose their targets the ships which were putting the stiffest repelling fire. This choice proved effective since these ships had been missed at least from the first attack. Thus the second attack achieved a nice spread, hitting the least damaged battleships as well as previously undamaged cruisers and destroyers. This attack also lasted about one hour, but due to the increased return fire, suffered higher casualties: six fighters and seven dive bombers being lost.

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wondered if any other fighters had been left behind, and ordered my pilot to go to the rendezvous point for a final check. Sure enough, there we found a second fighter plane who also followed joyfully after us.

It was extremely difficult for fighter planes to fly long distances at sea. They were not equipped with homing devices and radar as were the larger planes. It was therefore planned to have the bombers, upon completion of their missions, rendezvous with the fighters at a designated point and lead them back to the carriers. Some of the fighters, however, such as these two, must have missed the time of rendezvous, and they were indeed fortunate to find our plane which could lead them safely back to the task force and their carriers.

My plane was just about the last one to get back to Akagi where refueled and rearmed planes were being lined up on the busy flight deck in preparation for yet another attack. I was called to the bridge as soon as the plane stopped, and could tell on arriving there that Admiral Nagumo's staff had been engaged in heated discussions about the advisability of launching the next attack. They were waiting for my account of the battle.

"Four battleships definitely sunk," I reported. "One sank instantly, another capsized, the other two settled to the bottom of the bay and may have capsized." This seemed to please Admiral Nagumo who observed, "We may then conclude that anticipated results have been achieved."

Discussion next centered upon the extent of damage inflicted at airfields and air bases, and I expressed my views saying, "All things considered we have achieved a great amount of destruction, but it would be unwise to assume that we have destroyed everything. There are still many targets remaining which should be hit. Therefore I recommend that another attack be launched."

The factors which influenced Admiral Nagumo's decision—the target of much criticism by naval experts, and an interesting subject for naval historians—have long been unknown, since the man who made it died in the summer of 1944 when United

States forces invaded the Marianas. I know of only one document in which Admiral Nagumo's reasons are set forth, and there they are given as follows:

1. The first attack had inflicted all the damage we had hoped for, and another attack could not be expected to greatly increase the extent of that damage.

2. Enemy return fire had been surprisingly prompt even though we took them by surprise; another attack would meet stronger opposition and our losses would certainly be disproportionate to the additional destruction which might be inflicted.

3. Intercepted enemy messages indicated at least 50 large planes still operational; and we did not know the whereabouts of the enemy's carriers, cruisers, and submarines.

4. To remain within range of enemy land-based planes was distinctly to our disadvantage, especially since the effectiveness of our air reconnaissance was extremely limited.

I had done all I could to urge another attack, but the decision rested entirely with Admiral Nagumo, and he chose to retire without launching the next attack. Immediately flag signals were hoisted ordering the course change, and our ships headed northward at high speed.

*Nagumo's reasons
for no second
attack*